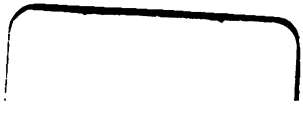


Peggy-in-the-Rain

"'Happy!' she murmured dreamily."

[Page 237]

Peggy-in-the-Rain

By

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY: MCMXIII

Printed in the United States of America

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Peggy-in-the-Rain

I

THE breeze which had tempered the heat of a mid-March day had died away, and the leaves along the bridle path hung motionless in the sudden oppression. Above the tree tops the sky darkened ominously. Gordon Ames, gun on shoulder and three brace of plump quail bulging the pockets of his shooting jacket, paused for breath and wiped the perspiration from his face.

It was a good-looking face. Some thought it too good-looking. Perhaps, although the chin was square and prominent, the nose straight and the brown eyes candid and direct, it lacked strength, or seemed to. The fault was with the mouth, which, unhidden by a mustache, was smilingly soft. On the whole, however, the face was pleasing; honest, good-humored, merry, with a

glint of dare-deviltry in the brown eyes. For the rest, Gordon Ames was twenty-seven years of age, five feet and eleven inches in height and slender with the slenderness of hard muscles and firm flesh.

The dry sand of the path made hard walking, and the air had grown hot and heavy and humid. It didn't require the sullen rumble of thunder overhead to apprise him of the fact that he was probably in for a wetting. He had been coming to Aiken for many winters and had long since learned the symptoms heralding the approach of the brief but terrific thunderstorms of the South. He was not particularly concerned about getting wet, and it wouldn't have helped if he had been, for he was a good mile and a half from town. Farther along, however, there was a deserted cabin, which Garret Fessenden had neglected to pull down when he had bought the tract to round out his five hundred acres of game preserve, and Gordon decided to reach it if the storm would let him. He shifted his shotgun to his other shoulder and pushed on. The woods had become very still. Not a leaf stirred, not a bird chirped. The jasmine blooms had almost gone, but enough

remained on the festooning vines to fill the breathless air with their languorous perfume. A heavier rumble of thunder broke the silence, and as it died away in diminishing echoes, there came the soft thud of hoofs on the path behind him. He stepped aside and turned to look. A big rangy sorrel swept into sight at a gallop, and Gordon made ready to lift his hat to the rider, a girl in a linen habit who was bending low in the saddle as she raced against the storm. Gordon met for an instant the half-startled glance from a pair of dark eyes, and then horse and rider were past him and out of sight around the next turn.

He went on, mildly curious about the girl. There had been only time for a glance, but the glance had shown him a face quite unknown to him; and Gordon thought he knew, by sight at least, most of the feminine faces of Aiken's winter colony. Certainly the girl might be staying at the big hotel on the outskirts of town, but that didn't explain her mount. The big sorrel with his three white stockings was not a livery horse, of that he was certain. Moreover, he was almost equally certain that he had seen the horse before. Gordon's memory for horses was more

than equal to his memory for girls, and now it annoyed him that he couldn't place the sorrel. Then there came the first patter of rain on the leaves, and the problem, which was an unimportant one in any case, was forgotten. A great flash of intense white light flooded the forest, turning the leaves to a strange and ghastly shade of arsenical green, and then a clap of thunder, deafening, appalling, rent the heavens and shook the earth, and the deluge began.

It is one thing to get moderately wet and quite another to be soaked to the skin. Gordon ran. Already the soft sand was heavy with water, and every hoof-print was a tiny puddle. The drops pelted down in great white streaks, blinding him. Leaves, stripped from their branches, splotched the ground. It was like a cloudburst. With the deserted cabin in mind, Gordon plunged on along the winding path, his shotgun tucked under his arm in an attempt to protect the breech. The lightning flashed almost incessantly, and the thunder, following the livid radiances, seemed to rip the sky in its terrific crashes. The cabin was still some distance away, how far he couldn't even guess, and already he was mentally likening his

condition to that of a drowned rat, when, above the hissing clamor of the rain, he heard a cry. He stopped, shielded his eyes and looked about. At a little distance from the path was a big magnolia, and under it stood the horse with the three white stockings. His first glance failed to detect the girl, but a flash of light flooded the scene the next instant and Gordon caught sight of a figure huddled against the bole of the tree, of a white, frightened face, of a wet, gloved hand holding tightly to the bridle reins. He brushed through the dripping underbrush that caught and tripped him and hurried to the shelter of the tree. The horse, plainly nervous, whinnied at his approach. The girl summoned a smile to her pale face. She had been crouching on the ground, but now she stood up, steadying herself against the tree, her knees trembling under her.

"Would you mind—staying here?" she asked. "I'm so awfully afraid! I——"

A clap of thunder drowned her voice. Gordon smiled and nodded reassuringly, leaned his gun against the tree, and took the reins from her clenched hand.

"Mind!" he exclaimed when the thunder had spent. "I should say not! Why, this is perfectly bully; a regular rain-proof tent!" He patted the horse's neck, spoke soothingly, and the sorrel, pointing his ears, seemed less restive on the instant. There was a flash of lightning, and the girl gasped and closed her eyes. The thunder broke, and she strained backward against the tree with clenched hands, fighting against her terror. When he could make himself heard, Gordon spoke lightly and cheerfully, apparently not noticing her panic.

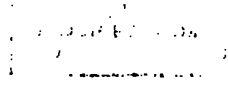
"Quite a storm, isn't it? It will be all over in five minutes, though, and the sun out again. Did you get very wet?"

"N-no, I rode in here as soon as the rain started," she replied, her wide eyes straining for the next flash. "Oh, I'm such a coward about thunder and lightning. It—it's silly, I know, but I can't— Oh!"

He waited again. Then:

"Sit down," he said authoritatively. "Here, we'll both sit down. The ground isn't very wet, and, anyway, you'll be home in a few minutes." He drew the horse nearer, squatted beside her and

"'Would you mind—staying here? I'm so awfully afraid!'"



took her hand. "Don't mind, do you? Just something to hold on to, you know."

She smiled wanly and clung tightly to his hand, shaking her head.

"I don't feel so scared," she said. "Isn't it almost over?"

"Pretty nearly now," he replied cheerfully. "First thing we know the sun will be out and we'll be steaming like—like a couple of clams!"

She tried to smile at his simile, but a jagged flash rent the sky asunder above the tops of the drooping trees and she closed her eyes again and clenched Gordon's hand convulsively so that he flinched as his ring bit into the flesh. He had a chance to look at her then. She looked absurdly small and helpless. Her hat, a narrow-rimmed Panama with a green and white scarf, had slipped to one side, revealing a good deal of soft brown hair. She was decidedly pretty, even now, frightened and bedraggled as she was, and Gordon felt a surge of big-brotherly pity.

"It's a darned shame," he muttered.

The girl heard him and opened her eyes.

"I'm—so silly," she said faintly.

Her eyes, he saw, were very deeply blue, almost

violet, and now, with the terror in them, they were unnaturally large and dark. Somehow, with those eyes on him he felt less big-brotherly than he had a moment before. The eyes turned away and he was rather glad of it, for he found that his heart had begun to beat a strange tune. He studied the soft curve of her cheek and the little tendril of brown hair that had become plastered against it by the rain, and the desire to protect her became so strong that he could have stood up and, like Ajax, defied the lightning! The magnolia tree, while it fell far short of supplying the shelter of the tent that Gordon had likened it to, was a sturdy old forest giant, with a wide spread, and its great oval leaves, green-lacquered on top, spilled the rain from their glistening surfaces like so many duck's feathers. The rain found its way through, to be sure, but, Gordon reflected, perhaps the cabin which he had sought would have proved no tighter. The horse, trembling and snorting when the thunder crashed, behaved admirably, like the thoroughbred gentleman he was.

"They say," said the girl presently, "that it's dangerous to be under a tree. Is it?"

"Some trees," lied Gordon cheerfully, "but not a magnolia. I supposed that was the reason you selected this one. It's funny about magnolia trees. There's some—some quality in the—I think it's the sap, but it may be the bark—that deflects lightning. I thought of course you knew." He waited for the elements to have their inning. "We're just as safe here as though we were sitting on a glass table. You've never seen a magnolia that had been struck by lightning, have you?"

"N-no." She looked at him doubtfully and essayed a little laugh. "I—I don't believe it, but—it sounds nice!"

"When you know me better," replied Gordon gravely, "you'll want to apologize for that. I——"

The thunder had its way again, but the din was less and there had been a perceptible pause between the flash and the clap.

"Hear that?" he asked.

She nodded dumbly, staring straight in front of her with puckered brow, for all the world, thought Gordon with another swift surge of pity, as though she expected some one to strike her.

"Well, it's going by fast. Why, it's halfway to Augusta now. I dare say it's looking for the river. They say thunderstorms follow the rivers. I guess this one got lost in the woods, eh?"

"Pro-probably," she gasped.

"You're staying in Aiken?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We haven't met before, have we? But that's a silly question to ask. If we had I'd have remembered."

"I've been here only a few days."

"I see." The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and a strange silence held the forest. The storm was dying away toward the south. "May I ask whether he is yours?" Gordon nodded toward the horse. "I've seen him before, I'm sure."

"No, he isn't mine. He—was loaned to me. This habit, too." She glanced down at the wet gray linen skirt. "It's—a mess, isn't it?"

The color was creeping back into her cheeks now and she withdrew her hand from his.

"It will wash, won't it?" he asked carelessly.

"I suppose so. Oh, there's the sun!"

"Yes, and now we'll frizzle up with heat. What time is it, I wonder." He looked at his watch and whistled. "By Jove, almost five! That storm must have lasted fully a half hour."

"Oh, I must get back!" she exclaimed in dismay. "They'll think something has happened to me!"

"Something has," he responded with a smile. "You've been marooned under a magnolia tree with a horse, a strange man and six quail. Isn't that a happening?"

She colored faintly. "Six quail?" she murmured.

"In my pockets. I'd been shooting. Garry Fessenden lets me pot his birds. He's abroad this winter. When the storm came up I was hiking for the old cabin back there. I'm glad, though, I missed it."

"So am I," she said simply. "I'd have died in another minute or two if you hadn't come. Or perhaps I'd have just fainted. I—I couldn't have stood it much longer, I know. I suppose it was—cheeky for me to call out to you——"

"Cheeky! Rather not! It was very sensible. Besides, you were doing me a kindness; I'd have

been soaked to the skin if I'd kept on to the cabin."

"You look soaked to the skin now," she replied with a shaky laugh. Gordon liked that laugh. He liked her voice, too. In fact, as he looked at her now, he found every instant something new to like.

"Oh, I'm not really wet. This jacket sheds the rain pretty well, about as well as any 'rainproof' stuff does. Besides, I'm used to it. I'll be back at the hotel in ten minutes, and a tub and a palmetto will leave me feeling as fit as a fiddle."

"A palmetto?" she asked questioningly.

"Yes. Haven't you tried 'em? They make 'em to the King's taste at the club. I'll introduce you to one the first time we meet."

"Oh, it's something to drink?"

"Quite so," he laughed. "It's a very wonderful cocktail, quite the best thing to be found in Aiken. Oh, I say, you're not going yet?"

"I must." She tried to rise, but her cramped limbs failed her. Gordon sprang to his feet and helped her up.

"Are you sure you feel—right enough?" he

asked anxiously. "Don't you think you'd better wait a few minutes?"

She shook her head. "I'm all right now, thanks," she replied, pulling her hat into place and smoothing herself with quick, deft touches. "I must really get back. They may think I've been struck by lightning."

"At least let me go with you," he begged. "I'll walk along and keep a hand on the bridle."

But she shook her head. "You're very kind," she said firmly, "but it really isn't necessary. If you'll just give me a hand up——"

He led the sorrel out through the wet undergrowth to the bridle path. The sun was out hot, and on every branch and spray quivering drops glittered like diamonds or shone like chrysoprase, limpidly green. The horse, nodding his sleek head, seemed eager to be away. Gordon looked to the girth, tossed the reins back and held his hands for a rather scuffed little brown boot. The girl settled herself in the saddle.

"I hope you'll be none the worse for it," said Gordon, arranging the skirt of the bedraggled habit. "I shall see you again, of course. Everybody meets here."

"Perhaps," replied the girl, gathering up the reins.

"Perhaps! Oh, I say!"

She smiled and held down a small hand in a wet glove. "If we don't meet again you may credit yourself with having played the part of valiant knight beautifully. And the lady in distress thanks you very, very much indeed."

"Well—but—I shall want to know about you! Whether you caught cold, you know, or—or anything."

"I don't catch colds. You need not have any uneasiness about me," she answered with a smile.

"In the stories I have read," said Gordon plaintively, "the rescued Princesses are more—are much kinder."

"But I'm not a Princess, Mr. Ames."

"Then we *have* met before!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"No, never."

"But you know my name?"

"Why not?" She smiled. "Do you suppose that a gentleman who inherits—how many millions is it?—Fifty? A hundred?—when he is just out of college can escape attention? You have

been pointed out to me more than once, Mr. Ames."

"Where? In New York?"

She nodded.

"Then you live there?"

"At present."

"And your name?" he asked boldly.

She shook her head again.

"It looks like a challenge," he said with a laugh and a frown. "If it is——"

"It isn't, really. I'm not trying to make a mystery of myself. I'm very grateful to you for —for being so nice to me, but—there isn't any more, Mr. Ames."

"You mean you don't want to know me," he said a trifle stiffly.

"I mean—" She paused and frowned at the horse's restive head. Then, turning to him gravely, "I mean," she went on, "that I am not what you think I am. This is a borrowed horse and a borrowed habit. I am a daw in peacock's feathers. I am not in your set, Mr. Ames, and our paths are not likely to cross again."

"That doesn't matter," he said sturdily. "I want to know you."

"Suppose you did know me?" she asked.

"Why, then—we could be friends, couldn't we?"

"Do you really think so?" she asked mockingly. "Do you think a girl who earns her living—for that is what I do, Mr. Ames—can afford to have Gordon Ames for a friend?"

"I don't see why not," he said stubbornly.

"But I think you do see," she smiled. "I must go. Good-by—and thank you."

"Wait!" He laid a hand on the bridle. "I can't have it end this way. I— Why, I'm more than half in love with you, girl, whoever you are! Doesn't that mean a little to you? Can't you be a little bit kind?"

"Do you think—that's a good reason—for being kind to you?" she asked slowly, the color creeping into her cheeks, but her eyes meeting his quite steadily.

"I certainly do! Hang it, girl, surely you're not one of those narrow Puritans who think that just because a chap has money and belongs to what they call the 'swell set,' he's a—brute and a bounder! Why in Heaven's name shouldn't we be friends? Besides, you—you're not——"

"You are trying to say," she laughed as he faltered, "that I am old enough to take care of myself? I am. I'm twenty-three, and I've been taking care of myself for five years."

"Then——"

"Oh, but wait, please! Suppose I unreasonably forget that it was just friendship? You know you're not at all bad looking, Mr. Ames; and you don't seem a bit more conceited than the average man; and you can be very sweet and nice. So, as I say, suppose I fell in love with you?"

His face flushed. "I wish to God you would!" he said hoarsely.

"And if I did?" she asked ironically.

"Why—" The pause was short enough, but it was there—"why, if you did, I suppose we'd do the usual thing."

"Which is?" she pursued mercilessly.

"Be married." He laughed bitterly. "Your opinion of me is certainly flattering."

She paid no heed to that. "Be married," she mused. "You and I; the millionaire and the work girl! It would make a good story for the papers, at least, wouldn't it?"

"Damn the papers!" he said savagely. "I

believe you're laughing at me all the time. Well, laugh if you like. But you can't forget me, can you?" he challenged.

She shook her head. "I don't think I want to. You have quite restored my faith in your kind, Mr. Ames. Thanks for that; and, again, for your kindness."

She picked up the reins. He laid a hand on them behind the bit.

"No, you can't go yet," he said hoarsely. "We've got to come to terms!"

Her eyes darkened, although a little smile still trembled about her mouth. For a long moment their glances held. Then he dropped his hand and stepped back.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "Good-by."

But when the horse moved forward she reined him back. And the smile grew until it was a very kindly one.

"If you're going, please go," he said impatiently.

But having won her victory, womanlike she would yield.

"Then—you don't want to know?" she asked.

"What?"

"My name."

"You know I do."

"Really?"

He nodded.

"Then . . . it's Peggy."

He waited. She shook the reins and the sorrel pranced forward.

"Peggy what?" he demanded.

She turned and smiled back at him as the horse broke into a canter.

"Peggy-in-the-Rain," she said softly.

II

IN the branches of a chinaberry tree outside the open window a mocking-bird was going through his repertoire, a repertoire of trills and gurgles and sudden flutings that started off with a dash and invariably ended, after a dozen notes, for all the world like the performance of a tenor who has forgotten his song. But, unlike the singer, he showed no embarrassment. Off he went again, throatily chanting of the rain that had brought him a bountiful supper, trilling of the charms and virtues of his mate, who, doubtless, was attending to her housewifely duties and awaiting her lord's return in some nearby tree. Gordon, getting leisurely into his dinner clothes, went to the window and watched him where, halfway along a slender branch, he stood, head up, pouring a cascade of music from his trim gray body.

"Go it, you little duffer," encouraged Gordon,

wrestling with a stubborn stud. "Tilt your head back and let's have it. That's the stuff!"

The bird heard and cocked an inquiring beady eye toward the open window. He shifted one foot, put his head at an angle and examined Gordon exhaustively. Then, apparently satisfied, he swelled his throat, took a firm grip on the branch and proceeded to tell all about everything. And Gordon, having conquered the refractory stud, listened.

Swing, swing, swing in the chinaberry tree!
Here's a breeze! Here's a breeze!
The leaves are rustling about me
And the twilight is creeping up, up
Over the hill and through the darkening forest,
And the moon, the tiny moon, hangs like a silver worm
Above the steeple. It has rained and the world
Is damp and fragrant, and the little fat bugs
Are crawling. *There's one! There's one! There's one!*

Sing, sing, sing in the chinaberry tree!
Hear me! Hear me! Hear me!
Was ever a song so sweet as mine?
See me ruffle and swell! What a voice have I!
I have dined; I am happy; I sing! Over there
Sits my plump little wife by our nest.

If I call she will answer. Did you hear? Did you hear?
Such a sweet little wife! I love her, I love her!
Eh? Did she call? Just a minute, my dear;
I must finish my song; just a minute, a minute, a minute!
Oh, how I sing! I'm in love with my voice,
And my wife and the beautiful world! Heigho! Good night!
Here I come! Here I come! Here I come!

Off he darted, a gray streak in the soft twilight.

"If there's a Hammerstein in Birdland," murmured Gordon, "he will have you signed for next season, I bet."

He lighted a cigarette, flicked the match onto the lawn below and blew a blue cloud of smoke through the window.

"What a voice *she* had!" he went on, half to himself. "Peggy! What a dear, queer little name! Peggy-in-the-Rain, she called herself." He smiled. "Please, who are you, Peggy-in-the-Rain? And where are you now, I wonder. Just around the corner, on the next street? Up yonder there in the big hotel? Out on Whiskey Road in some big white stucco palace? Are you think-

ing of me—a little—Peggy-in-the-Rain? Well, wherever you are, my dear, here's to you." He lifted a glass and drained the last spoonful of amber in the bottom. "Here's to you and to our next meeting, Peggy-in-the-Rain!"

III

EVERYBODY meets in Aiken, Gordon had declared. And the next morning he set out to prove it so. White-flanneled, he hurried over to the golf club. There were plenty there who would have stayed his anxious search. The Golden Widow—they called Mrs. Burke-Parrish that to distinguish her from a brunette widow—barred his way with a silken sunshade.

"I'm looking for a friend," he explained.

"Won't I do?" asked Mrs. Hampton.

"Not as a friend, Fair Lady," he answered, catching sight of a face on the porch that might be Hers and longing to be off. "Hello, Pete."

"Tell us about her," said Peter Waring, hooking the handle of his stick about Gordon's ankle.

"Her?" asked the victim. "Who?"

"The friend you're looking for, of course. What's she like, old man?"

"Yes, dark or fair, Mr. Ames?" added the widow.

"Short or tall, old man?"

"Kind or unkind, O Disconsolate Lover?"

"Er—she's rather tall and short, with a lot of light black hair. And she's distinctly unkind, since she's evidently not here."

"She's foxy," declared Pete. "That's all, old man. They all are."

"Brute!" said the widow. "Ask Mr. Ames to drive out to the Farm with us this afternoon, Peter."

Gordon gently disengaged his imprisoned ankle and shook his head. "Don't do it, Pete," he warned regretfully. "I'd have to refuse you, and that would pain me deeply."

The Golden Widow pouted. "I believe the man's absolutely in love! Think of it! Gordon Ames in love!"

"I wondered if you'd never guess my secret," Gordon sighed.

The widow threatened him with the formidable sunshade and he retreated in terror. He doubled back and forth through and about the clubhouse without success. Then, as it was still early, he

telephoned out to Amesdene for his saddle horse, joined a group of taproom golfers and imbibed a long, cold julep while waiting. Folly, a bay mare with an excitable and suspicious disposition, sidled her way through town, having a conniption fit at every encounter with a street car, and cantered through the pines to the big hotel on the other side of the village. Gordon ambled the length of the piazza, snooped into shady parlors and finally searched the register, running his finger back over two weeks of signatures. But that method was rather hopeless, as he realized, for it was more than likely that the name he sought was only a diminutive, or even a nickname. At all events, he found no entry on the register that encouraged inquiry, and he mounted his horse again and rode out to Amesdene.

The big white house with its tall pillars and green blinds, a rather showy replica of an old-fashioned Southern Colonial residence, was closed, for since Gordon's father had died, five years before, the place had lost its attractions for Mrs. Ames, who preferred the dingy brownstone house on Fifth Avenue to any place she knew of. Gor-

don, who liked Aiken for the attractions it provided for idlers of his kind, put up at the hotel in the village, using the Amesdene stables for his horses. Folly whisked up the drive, between rows of soldierly oleanders, and sidled into the stable yard. Culver, head groom and caretaker, was bandaging the ankles of a two-year-old, who, a daughter of the famous Amesdene Adventuress by the equally famous Amesdene Hero, had been named Ingenue and was booked to carry off some blues in the roadster classes at the winter shows. A stable-boy ran out to take Gordon's mount, and Folly disappeared, shaking her head and jangling her bit, determined to remain in the limelight to the last moment. After a talk about Ingenue and the other horses Gordon asked:

"Culver, do you know a big sorrel gelding with three white feet?"

"'Igh in the shoulders, sir?"

"Yes, quite, a big, rangy brute."

"I fancy it's that 'orse of the Morrills, sir. The Tiger they call him, sir, I think."

"Of course! That's where I saw him. Miss Morrill rode him out to the races last year. I knew I'd seen him somewhere."

"Thinking of buying him, sir?"

"No, I don't want him. Too leggy, eh?"

"That's accordin' to fancy, Mr. Ames," replied Culver, chewing thoughtfully on the straw in his mouth. "'E's an oldish 'orse, sir, but 'e's got a lot o' life in 'im yet. At five hundred 'e'd be a rare bargain, sir."

But Gordon was not listening.

"Give me The Goat, Culver. How's his knee, by the way?"

"It's 'ealin', sir." Culver spoke disinterestedly. He didn't approve of The Goat, who was a half-bred Kentucky with little to recommend him but strength and willingness. "'E won't 'urt to be used a bit, sir."

The Goat was led out presently, a small flea-bitten gray with a meek eye and ears so large that Culver, out of Gordon's hearing, referred to him "as that damned mule." The Goat had been purchased under the misapprehension that he had somewhere within him the making of a polo pony, but he had proven too slow for that purpose, and Gordon, admiring the animal for his good disposition, promptly dubbed him The Goat and used him more often than any other saddle horse in

the stable. They made a good deal of fun of Gordon and his Goat in the village at first, but now they were familiar sights and had ceased to arouse comment.

After lunch he mounted The Goat again and trotted westward. It was quite within the range of possibility that what had happened once would happen again, and he turned in through the Fessenden gateway, quite prepared for a second meeting. He pulled The Goat down to a walk and followed the bridle path in and out through the forest. But although he passed several riders—for the roads of the estate were open to the public—he saw nothing of the sorrel with the three white stockings or of the girl with the scuffed brown boots. In the end he decided that he had come out too early, and so, having completed the circuit of the place and emerged at the north of the village, he turned around and walked The Goat slowly back again, much to that animal's bewilderment, since walking was something he was very seldom allowed to indulge in. But the return journey was as disappointing as the other, and he jogged back to the club, feeling rather dis-

gruntled with his luck. Of course, he comforted himself, he was bound to find her again sooner or later, for Aiken was too small a place for anyone to hide in, but, like the man in the song, he wanted what he wanted when he wanted it. And, having been luckier than the general run of persons in that particular, he was intolerant of denial. He played a remarkably poor game of golf-pool with Peter Waring and two other men, and went back to the hotel to dress for dinner, blaming himself for having wasted a whole day in searching for a person who didn't want to see him again.

IV

AT all events, he could easily discover her identity. He had only to question Leona Morrill, and Leona would undoubtedly be at the dinner which he was attending. And yet it would be a good deal like throwing himself on the mercy of the enemy, for ever since the newspaper had predicted an engagement between him and the girl, and a certain journal of society had actually announced it, Leona Morrill had disliked him. He knew it and the rest of the world guessed it. There were some who declared—women, these—that Gordon Ames had behaved badly when the enterprising press had sought to hasten the engagement. Others—and these were the men, chuckling wickedly—declared that he had been "jolly wise." What he had really done was to run! Leona, possibly finding something uncomplimentary in the precipitancy of his flight, had seemingly never forgiven it. It was a recognized rule that the two were

not to be seated together at the table, although they met in public without open hostilities.

Miss Morrill was a very handsome girl, tall, finely built, a good horsewoman and the only child of Anderson Morrill, whose Morrill's Magic Malt, handed down to him by his father, has been a household word—and a household necessity—for sixty years. "Old Magic" Morrill they had called Leona's grandfather back in Utica, since on all his preparations for restoring and preserving the health of humanity the word magic had featured. But the Magic Malt was the only one of the long list which had survived the test of time—and the Pure Food and Drugs Act. Whether there was aught of the magic about his medicines and cure-alls, it must be acknowledged that there was something closely akin to magic in the manner in which the astute old Yankee had accumulated wealth. Anderson Morrill retained a controlling stock in the business, but did not soil his hands with it. Nor, you may be sure, did he serve Morrill's Magic Malt as an appetizer at his dinners, although that excellent concoction contained ingredients not out of place in an appetizer. Anderson Morrill held true to the prin-

ciples and obligations of the Second Generation. He rode to hounds in a pink coat, maintaining his own pack on Long Island and being M.F.H., cruised about the world in a steam yacht that was the last cry in nautical comfort, kept up three estates, and, in brief, proved to the world that only one generation is required to make a gentleman—when aided by magic. He was a fair horseman, a poor huntsman, a mediocre shot, a good husband and an indulgent father. He gave much to charity and saw that the world learned of it. He was ambitious regarding his daughter, and it was said that his disappointment when her engagement to Gordon Ames was denied was truly pathetic. At present, having failed at an alliance with America's Aristocracy of Wealth, he was patently negotiating for an alliance with England's Nobility of Poverty, and the fair-haired Earl of Marctdell—pronounced Mardel, if you please—who had been under his wing most of the winter was about run to earth. The earl was a good-natured, not overly scintillant youth who was known through the colony as Tommy or Tommy Tupence. "I say, don't call me that," he had begged a lady who addressed him as Your

Grace. "Call me Tommy. The rest of it isn't worth tupence over here, you know."

It was Tommy whom Gordon gently but firmly detached from Leona Morrill on the porch after dinner.

"It won't do, Tommy," he said severely. "You're constituting yourself a combination in restraint of trade, old chap."

"Oh, but I say!" remonstrated Tommy as Gordon pushed him away.

"Objection overruled. If you don't run along I'll fine you twenty-nine million dollars, Tommy."

If Leona was surprised she failed to show it. She looked merely languidly amused. She affected languor, and it became her.

"It wears four shoes and only three stockings," said Gordon, taking the chair beside her. "Guess my riddle."

"The Tiger," replied Leona. "He's not for sale."

"Um; sorry. I saw him yesterday and I like his looks."

Miss Morrill remained silent.

"A—er—a girl was riding him, I believe. A friend of yours?"

She nodded, watching him calmly. Gordon smiled disarmingly.

"The fact is," he confessed, "I ran across her during the thunderstorm and we shared the same shelter for a few minutes. One can't discover young ladies in forests without becoming at least mildly curious about them."

"What is it you want to know about her?" asked Leona.

"Well, who she is, for one thing. After that, *where* she is."

"She didn't tell you her name?"

"Why should she? One doesn't ask a girl under such circumstances——"

"No? How long did you—share the same shelter?"

Gordon shrugged. "Five minutes, perhaps; ten, maybe. It was banging away most of the time and there wasn't much chance for confidences."

Miss Morrill smiled. "Ten minutes? Then I fancy if you didn't learn her name it was because she wouldn't tell it."

Gordon made a grimace. "That doesn't sound flattering," he laughed.

"We are hardly—strangers," she replied coldly.

He was silent a moment. Then,

"Suppose we pass on to the second question," he suggested. "*Where* is she?"

"What time is it?"

"Ten minutes to nine," he answered, after looking at his watch.

"Then—I'd say—she was about at Washington."

"Washington! You mean that—she's gone?"

"Yes, she left this morning on the early train."

"For New York?"

"She told you that much, then?"

"Incidentally, yes."

"But not her name?"

"Surely, that's not strange," he smiled. "The meeting was rather—er—casual, you see."

"But you want to know it?"

"Please."

"Why?"

"Curiosity."

"Vulgar—and sometimes dangerous."

"But I'm not a cat; at least, I hope not."

"No, you're not catty. But I can't tell you her name."

"*Can't* or won't?"

"Well, won't. I'll tell you why. She is a friend of mine. We went to the same school a few years ago and she was one of the very few girls who were genuine. Her people—" Leona paused a moment—"were poor. She herself works for her living. She is not in our set and she's not your kind of a girl. And—well, in short, Gordon, it's no good."

"My kind of a girl," he repeated questioningly. "Just what is my kind of a girl?"

"You surely understand me," she replied a trifle impatiently. "I mean that she is not a girl you would marry and she's not a girl who would—take you without marriage. Is that frank enough?"

"Quite," he said dryly. "I must either marry the young lady or keep away, then. Is that it?"

"Exactly."

"You haven't much of an opinion of me as a friend, have you?"

"I don't think you'd make a very good friend for a girl who is situated as she is."

"You reminded me a moment ago that we are scarcely strangers," he said mildly. "Is that your real opinion of me?"

"I am considering you as one of—of your set," she answered calmly. "Besides, she doesn't want you to follow her."

"Then she thought it possible that I would? She told you so?"

"The expression is mine. What she did say was that she hoped you wouldn't try to find out about her. That was before the telegram came. She expected to remain with me another week."

"Oh, so it was a telegram that took her home?"

"Yes. Gordon, the girl is in trouble, a whole big lot of trouble. Let her alone, please."

"I'm sorry," he said, after a moment's silence. "You won't tell me her name, then?"

"No, I won't."

"I could learn it, I suppose," he mused.

"Yes, you could question the servants."

"I might even do that in my desperation," he replied with a smile. "However, I won't. Just to prove that I am not quite as bad as you paint me, I won't. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, if you mean it."

"Much obliged!"

"Oh, I'm not questioning your veracity," she said calmly. "I'm sure you mean to steer clear now, only—I'm wondering if it will last."

"I see. Well, I'm only agreeing not to ask any more questions now—and here. If I should learn by accident I'd probably try to see her again. I suppose it's the—well, the element of mystery that has got me going. I dare say if she had told me her name I wouldn't have thought about her again."

"Then you did ask her?"

He nodded: "Yes; she told me the Peggy part of it."

"Oh!" Leona frowned. "She didn't——"

He laughed. "She didn't fess up to that?" he asked.

"She may have mentioned it. I don't remember. And now, if you're quite through——"

"Quite, thank you. Yes, I'd better go, for Tommy is scowling quite fiercely at me. By the way, you and she write?"

"Occasionally."

"Then, in your next letter——"

"No," she said decisively.

He laughed as he arose. "Not even that?"

"Not even that."

"Do you know, Leona, I believe you're queering your own game?"

"In what way?"

"By—well, by flaunting the 'Keep off the Grass' sign too violently. The grass begins to look terribly inviting. Good night."

The Northern mail had arrived at the hotel during his absence, and Gordon found a letter from his mother. Mrs. Ames wrote regularly to her son and married daughter every Monday afternoon at a certain hour. She was the kind of woman whose life is ruled off into squares, with a duty for each square. Gordon had declared once that the notion that the country set its clocks by the Government Observatory was exploded, that the clocks were corrected every morning at seven-fifteen, when his mother rang for her maid, and again at four-thirty in the afternoon, when Hurd, the butler, paraded solemnly into the drawing-room with the tea-cart. There was only one portion of Mrs. Ames' four pages—she always wrote four pages; never more nor less—that interested Gordon, and that only slightly.

Mr. Lovering telephoned me this morning of the death by pneumonia of Emma Milburn. She was Thomas Milburn's wife, you know, and Thomas Milburn was my cousin by marriage. Of course, Emma Milburn was no relation to me, but I suppose we should take some cognizance of her death. I shall order flowers sent. You doubtless recall that when your Grandfather Sturges died there was some unpleasantness over his disposition of the property. Thomas Milburn went to law, claiming, I believe, that my father had promised to provide for him. I don't recall the particulars, but nothing ever came of it. As Thomas Milburn was only my father's first cousin once removed, it scarcely seems probable, does it? He never amounted to anything. I refer to Thomas Milburn, of course. Naturally, after the unpleasantness I quite lost sight of them. She could not have been very old, for I remember that she was quite a young girl when she was married. She was a Gorham, from somewhere in New Jersey. I never could remember the names of places in New Jersey. I think it was Plainfield, however. Or is Plainfield in Connecticut? I shall ask Mr. Lovering to inquire into the circumstances. I think there are children. Thomas Milburn never made any money and perhaps we had best make some provision for the children if necessary. Not that I ever believed his story of your Grandfather Sturges having promised him money when he died, but I do think that charity should begin at home when the subject is worthy. I will advise you in my next letter of what Mr. Lovering reports. I hope you are re-

maining in good health and enjoying yourself. I saw your name in the paper again the other day, Thursday; I believe it was. It was a very sensational account of some horse racing by moonlight. I do wish, my dear boy, you would try not to get mixed up in such affairs. Doubtless it was all quite harmless, but you know the horrid way the newspapers exaggerate. As a family we have always avoided anything savoring of notoriety. When do you return North? Mr. Lovering was inquiring. I think he wants to see you about matters connected with the estate. I have put your name down for five thousand for the Chancel Fund. I hope you approve. I have had nothing but picture postcards from your sister for a fortnight. She knows how I detest the vulgar things. They are in Germany at present, I believe, although I have no authority but the postcards. Caroline has become dreadfully slipshod since her marriage. I notice it in so many ways. Hurd is suffering a great deal from rheumatism these days. The weather continues cold and damp.

Gordon was more concerned over the butler's rheumatism than anything else mentioned in the letter. Hurd and he had been chums ever since he had been big enough to ride around on the old man's shoulders. He dropped the mail into his pocket, and procured a highly colored postcard exhibiting an expanse of unnaturally green grass

sprinkled with white costumes and backed by a lemon-yellow building. It was inscribed "Palmetto Golf Club House, Aiken, S. C."

"Dear Mums," he wrote. "Tell Hurd to carry a horse-chestnut in his pants pocket. Much love. Gordon."

He chuckled as he addressed it and dropped it into the box. His mother detested postcards, disliked being called "Mums," and thought the word "pants" extremely vulgar.

V

THE season at Aiken came to an end with a sudden visitation of hot weather, and the colony went northward, many by easy stages that dropped them for a week or so at Pinehurst or Virginia Hot Springs or Old Point. Gordon, with Peter Waring and Mortimer Poole, dallied for a fortnight at the latter resort, and then went on again in a chilly rain that blurred the car windows and depressed even Peter's buoyant spirits. Mort Poole left them at Philadelphia, and Gordon and Peter reached New York late at night on the first day of April. Outside the terminal they shivered in the cold, damp breeze as they waited for Peter's car to come up.

"This weather is an April fool on us," said Peter plaintively. "When does spring begin up here, anyway, old man?"

"One month after you get back, whenever that happens," replied Gordon. "Thank Heaven he brought the limousine!"

"I've got one, sir," confided Hurd confidentially as, a quarter of an hour later, Gordon handed him his overcoat.

"Eh? One what, you old reprobate?"

"A chestnut, sir; it's in my pocket, sir, and it's done a world of good. I had some difficulty getting one, sir, at this time of year, but here it is." He exhibited it proudly.

"By jove!" said Gordon, "so it is! And they're out of season, too, Hurd."

"Yes, sir, but a cousin of my wife's has a tree of them, sir, in her yard over on Staten Island and her little boy had some he'd kept. Mrs. Ames is waiting up for you, sir, in her room."

"I'll go right up. You were very fortunate, Hurd. You—er—you've noticed an improvement already, you say?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Why, last week I could scarcely bend my back, sir!"

"Quite wonderful! Send a couple of sandwiches and the Scotch to my room, will you?"

Mrs. Ames had not been wasting her time, as the little pile of gray envelopes, sealed, addressed and stamped, lying at her elbow on the writing desk, attested. She laid down her pen as Gordon

entered, kissed him, patted his hand then viewed him critically.

"You've lost flesh," she pronounced. "Don't get much thinner, Gordon; it isn't becoming. It was so with your father. He tried never to get below a hundred and sixty. You've come home to quite the worst weather of the spring."

"One always does. You're looking very fit, Mums."

She allowed the appellation to pass unchallenged, a sign of extreme amiability.

"I have had a very good month," she replied in a manner that seemed to imply that such a satisfactory result had been attained only by the wisest and most careful management on her part; an implication open to doubt, since Mrs. Ames' health was always good. "I've always thought," she went on, "that if folks would stay sensibly at home and not go flitting around the globe they'd be a lot better off. We're becoming a nation of gadders, Gordon."

"Anything new?" he asked.

"Nothing of interest to you, I think," she replied reflectively. "I believe Mr. Lovering is anxious to see you."

He nodded. "I had a wire from him yesterday. I'm going down in the morning. It's something about the road. The Interstate Commerce Commission is smelling a rat, I fancy; Lovering wired something about an inquiry into freight rates. But why drag me into it, eh?"

"But, Gordon, it's your own road! Surely——"

"It isn't my road at all, Fair Lady; it's Lovering's road, and Wharton's road and all the other old granny directors' road. If by any possible chance I have an idea of my own they throw up their hands in holy horror and squeak, 'Oh, dear, that would never do! Never in the world!' What's the use, eh? By Jove, some day I'll get up my spunk and go down there and take that road by the throat and shake the mischief out of it!"

"I suppose, my dear, that Mr. Lovering and Mr. Wharton and the others really know best. They're experienced, you see."

"Of course they know best! That's what makes me tired. Why the dickens didn't dad pound some railroad sense into me, I wonder? All I ever learned was to speak French and German with a

New York accent, take a fall out of Euclid, and not get Julius Cæsar confused with Velasquez."

Mrs. Ames, smoothing her gray silk gown, looked troubled. "I've never heard you talk like this before," she said almost plaintively. "I'm sure your father and I always meant to give you as good an education——"

"You did, Mums. Or, at least, you offered it to me. I was fool enough not to make the most of it."

"There was that year in Berlin——"

"That I wasted, I know. And I might have stayed here and taken a post-graduate course. But I didn't. If dad hadn't died when he did I suppose I'd have done differently. But when a fellow comes into a fortune as big as a skyscraper at twenty-one, why, there's only one thing to do, and that's get busy and dig into it. And the sad part of it is that I haven't even been a success as a spender!"

"That is surely to your credit, Gordon."

"No, it isn't! There's no credit coming to a fellow for falling down on what he attempts. I tried to be a spender and failed from the first. Somewhere inside me there's a—a leaven of New

England thrift that queers the game. Why, hang it, mother, I can't even loaf decently now! I get bored to death about every twenty-four hours. Sometimes I wish to Heaven I'd been born poor!"

"The obligations of wealth——" began Mrs. Ames.

"Don't, please, Mums! I know all about that. What I want is something to do. I think I'll get married."

"Marriage is hardly an occupation," returned his mother, smiling.

"By gad, it is for some poor devils! Teddy Norden was down at Aiken for a week or two with that filly of his, and I give you my word I never saw a man more fully occupied than he was!"

"I am very sorry for Mr. Norden," said his mother, "but when men marry out of their set—I hope there was no—no scandal?"

"Nothing special," replied Gordon, with a shrug. "Enough to keep Teddy on the *qui vive*, though."

"Well, I'm not sure that marriage wouldn't be very good for you, my boy. You're twenty-seven. Your father married when he was twenty-

eight. Have you—is there any one you fancy?"

"No, at the present moment I'm heart-whole." He paused a moment and frowned at the cigarette he was lighting. "Perhaps that's what the trouble is, Mums."

"If you are in earnest I'll look around for you, Gordon, but do try not to—to get mixed up again."

He nodded, blowing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "All right. Not likely, anyhow. I've sown my wild oats. Still, you needn't begin to look just yet. I guess I like talking about it better than plunging. Happy marriages don't seem, in my experience, to be exactly a drug on the market! Ever known any, Mums?"

"One, at any rate," replied Mrs. Ames gently.

"I know," said Gordon gloomily. "But you were different from the women nowadays. I don't suppose you ever had a real flirtation after you married dad, did you?"

"No, dear. I never saw the man worth flirting with, and I wouldn't have known how to flirt if I had."

"Oh, yes you would," replied Gordon cynically. "Flirting doesn't have to be learned. Well, I'm

tuckered." He drew his long length from the chair and stood up in the soft glow of the silk-shaded lights. Mrs. Ames sighed.

"Gordon, you're much too good looking. I don't know where you get it. Your father was a good man and a big man, but even I could never consider him handsome."

"Fortunately, then, I had a mother," responded Gordon. "Ever meet her, Mums? She's one of the best-lookers in New York this minute!"

Mrs. Ames smiled and shook her head. "I don't pretend that I wasn't—rather pretty when I was younger, Gordon——"

"My word, you're getting better looking every day, Mother! Why, you'd have had the whole bunch of 'em 'ridden off' if you'd been at Aiken! Good night. I'll look in before I go downtown." He bent over and kissed her. "How do you keep your hair so young-looking, Mums?"

"It's quite full of gray, my dear, and I'm only——"

"Careful!"

"Fifty-two, Gordon. Lots of women don't get gray before sixty."

"Gray!" Gordon chuckled. "Why, you

haven't enough gray hairs to put in a locket! Anyway, they'll become you when they do arrive; make you look more distinguished than ever. How are all the pet charities getting on?"

"Nicely, I think. That reminds me, dear. Can you stay a moment? It's about the Milburns."

"Who are the Milburns?" asked Gordon, yawning.

"Why, my dear, I wrote you——"

"Oh, yes, of course; tenth cousins or something. Somebody died, didn't they?"

"Emma Milburn. I sent flowers in your name and mine, Gordon. Then I asked Mr. Lovering to look into her affairs. I wrote you I was going to."

"Quite right. Then what?"

"Well, it seems that Emma left one child, a grown-up daughter; her name is—is Margaret, I think he said. I have his note here somewhere. Well, never mind now. I'm quite sure it was Margaret, anyhow. It seems that they were rather poor and the girl is left quite on her own resources. She is about twenty-two or three, I believe. I have never believed that my father made any promises to Thomas Millburn, Gordon,

but the girl is a relation in a way, and I think it is my duty to aid her. I've thought that, say, ten thousand dollars placed with Mr. Lovering for investment would be about right."

"Four or five hundred a year? Can a girl live on that?"

"She is already employed at something, Gordon, and I have no desire to make her independent of her work. That would be most inadvisable. But five hundred a year would provide very nicely for her. I'm wondering whether to give her the income for life or merely until she marries."

"Oh, let's go the whole hog, Mums. Perhaps she won't marry unless she has it. Have you ever seen her?"

Mrs. Ames shook her head. "I—I don't think I shall insist on that. It—might be painful, and could do no good. I don't think it is necessary for her to know where the money comes from, do you?"

"I fancy she won't much care," replied Gordon, hiding a yawn. "May I go halves with you?"

"No, dear, it's quite my affair. Still, I'm glad you approve. You do, Gordon?"

"Quite. Good night."

VI

IT is a penalty of Prominence to be photographed. The Home Edition of the *Evening Journal*, which an attendant was placing on the tables in the club when Gordon dropped in at four o'clock, flaunted a four-column cut on the first page which purported to be a snap-shot of the young millionaire emerging from the offices of the Central and Western Railroad after a conference with the directors. Had the reproduction been a little clearer it might have been observed that a frown disturbed the usual placidity of the young gentleman's brow. As it was, however, one had to accept the enterprising photographer's word as to the identity of the subject, for the picture showed only a dim figure, attired in light clothes and a derby hat, striding from the marble entrance of a building, with a feather-duster vender shuffling into range and a messenger-boy in the act of observing the principal figure over his shoulder and colliding

with the vender. There was a half-column of speculation masquerading as knowledge in which Gordon was referred to variously as the Boy Magnate, the Young Railroad President, the Bachelor Millionaire, and Society's Darling. Gordon glanced through the article, mentally shrugged his shoulders and tossed the paper to the table again. Then he picked up a magazine, pushed a button and dropped into a leather chair. An attendant crossed the heavy crimson and blue rug with noiseless steps.

"When Mr. Waring comes in," Gordon instructed, "ask him to look for me here, please."

The magazine, which he had selected quite at random, opened itself at an article on "New York's Landed Proprietors." The first turn of a page revealed a half-tone reproduction of a photograph labelled "Gordon Patterson Ames—Photo Copyrighted by Neville." Gordon had set for the likeness four years before, and it represented him as an insufferably priggish young man of twenty-three with an incipient mustache, his hair plastered to his head and a gardenia as big as a cabbage rose in the buttonhole of a checked morning coat. He shuddered. Old photographs, like sins,

continually find one out. With pardonable curiosity he turned back and began to read the article. "New York's Landed Proprietors—How the Old Knickerbocker families, together with a few More Recent Arrivals, have gained control of over a Billion Dollars worth of Manhattan Island —By Margaret Mill." There was little in the story that hadn't been told time and time before, but the facts were presented brightly and crisply, round numbers of seven, eight and nine figures were sprinkled through the text with breath-taking carelessness, and the accompanying illustrations showed bejeweled ladies and frock-coated men with lavish prodigality. It was a veritable Romance of Money. It started with the penniless butcher's son who, with the money accumulated in fur trading, purchased farm lands which now, in the fourth generation, were valued at almost a half-billion dollars. It told of the son of the Huguenot refugee who set up his ironmonger's shop and founded a fortune approximately represented to-day by nine figures. And so it went, tracing the development of one fortune after another so enticingly that Gordon, meaning only to skim the story, found himself reading it with

interest. His own real estate holdings he found placed at fifty millions, while his mother's personal property was figured at twenty-five. Gordon smiled, but the smile faded the next moment. "The present head of the Ames family," he read, "is but twenty-seven years of age and of his ability to add to the fortune of which he became possessed on the death of his father little is known. So far he has been seemingly content to leave the conduct of his affairs in the hands of older and wiser men. He is an enthusiastic sportsman, with horses and yachts his main hobbies. In society, where he is a notable figure, he is immensely popular, although his democratic tastes have at times quite shocked his friends. Gordon Ames is still young, and it may be that when he is tired of playing he will buckle down and show that he is, after all, a true son of the hardy New Englander who, in the last century, carved his fortune from the granite hills. But even lack of ability will scarcely affect so much of his fortune as is represented by New York real estate, which, barring the most unimaginable influences, will continue to increase in value from year to year."

"Who the devil writes these things for the

magazines?" he demanded as Peter Waring perched himself on the table.

Peter glanced uninterestedly at the article and shook his head. "Search me, old man. I don't. Wish I could. Never was able to string three words together and make sense. What's wrong with this one?"

Gordon hesitated. "Nothing," he answered finally, tossing the magazine aside. "Let's have a drink."

Peter glanced at the gold-rimmed clock over the library door. "Can't," he said, shaking his head. "I'm on the wagon till five. Beastly bore, but it's doctor's orders."

"Well, it'll be five by the time we get back there. Come on. What seems to be the trouble with you, Pete?"

"Doctor says liver. I don't know. I get up feeling like the very devil; don't eat; sleep rotten; grouchy all the time."

"You're in love, Pete."

Peter shook his head quite soberly. "No, that ain't it. I guess it's pickled liver, just like the doctor says. What do you want?"

"Who's giving this party? Waiter, bring Mr. Waring a liver pill and a glass of water."

The waiter smiled discreetly.

"Rye high-ball," said Peter. "I believe it's these damned mixed drinks that have got me going, Gordon. Saw your pretty in the paper this afternoon."

"Make it two. Yes, good likeness, wasn't it?"

"Well, I'd have known those long legs of yours. Ran into the Widow a minute ago on the Avenue."

"Ran into her? Well, you're insured, aren't you, up to twenty thousand? How much is a widow worth, Pete, if you break her?"

"She inquired about you."

"That means she's losing hope of you, Pete. Hope you told her I'd gone abroad or somewhere?"

"I don't believe she'd have me," replied Pete moodily.

"Good God, old man, you aren't thinking of *that*, are you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Say, look here, now; I'm 'most thirty, ain't I?"

"You ought to know better than I."

"Well, I am. Now, why not get married, eh?"

"Really and truly, you mean?"

"Shut up! Yes. I'm getting sort of sick of just hanging around, old man. What I want is a place to go home to."

"Foreclosed the mortgage, have they?"

"Hell, that ain't a home! I mean a—a place of my own, don't you see. A little house with a wife and a cat on the hearth——"

"Trouble is, Pete, it's hard nowadays to get a wife who will stay on the hearth. They all want to be treated like one of the family!"

"Quit kiddin'; I'm in earnest. Here's regards. Now, look; why not marry a nice girl and settle down?"

"Found her yet?"

"N-no. I could, though. I've got money enough to marry on——"

Gordon put his head back and laughed. "Good old Peter! He's got money enough to marry on! Pete, did you know that there are men in this old town who marry on twelve dollars a week?"

"Are there?" asked Peter vaguely. "Well, but look at the girls they marry! Make their own hats and do their own cooking, don't they? By

Jove, I'd like to find a girl who'd do that for me?"

"Think of your poor liver," said Gordon feelingly. "Look here, you poor old idiot, what you want is a housekeeper, not a wife. You can hire them."

"Oh, I'm through with that sort of thing," responded Pete virtuously.

"I wish you wouldn't misconstrue my suggestions. I was referring to a bona-fide housekeeper; a perfect lady. You advertise for them in the papers. They are usually widows, I believe, and dress in black merino, whatever that is, and live in the past. If you paid a big enough salary I'll bet you could get one to sit on the hearth with the cat."

"You're a damned fool," said Peter with a grin. "I come to you for sympathy and all I get is a lot of silly jokes. Let's have another drink."

"No more, thanks. What are you doing this evening?"

"Dinner; Sinclair's. Going?"

"I believe I am. I'd forgotten it. Let's get away and go to a show afterwards."

"I'm your boy," said Peter more cheerfully.

"Seen 'The Girl with the Diamond Heels'? They say it's ripping."

"All right. I'll get some tickets. Are you crazy about boxes?"

"Hate 'em. Feel like a silly ass sitting in a box. First row for me."

"Punch the bell, will you? I'm sorry if I haven't been sufficiently sympathetic, Pete. The fact is, your plan rather took my wind. I—I've been contemplating matrimony myself."

"*You?* Good Lord!"

"Well, why not, you silly fool? Think you're the only man in New York who can get married?"

"But—but you're not the marrying kind, Gordon?"

"Why not?"

"Because—oh, I don't know."

"Of course you don't know, you chump!" replied Gordon, signing his check. "Cigarette? There isn't such a thing as a non-marrying kind of a man, Pete. I'm just as much of a marrying man as you are, confound you. And I've a darned good mind to try it."

"Who's the lady?"

"I don't know—yet."

"Hm."

"Same to you. Come on and let's get those tickets. Anyhow, it's time."

"Yes, they're sold out weeks ahead."

"I mean it's time for me to get married. Pete, that picture of a wife and a cat on the hearth looks awfully good to me, too!"

VII

AND the picture persisted after he had parted from Peter Waring at his corner and walked on uptown alone in the spring twilight. The hearth, he reflected, wouldn't be a grandiose affair. In fact, it would be something like the hearth in his Adirondack bungalow, a comfortable, homey affair of rough bricks, with an inglenook. And the cat would be an old-fashioned tabby cat such as one reads of in old-fashioned stories. And the wife—well, she wouldn't be actually on the hearth, but she'd be in front of it, with the firelight playing on her brown hair and in her eyes, which would be darkly blue. And when he came up she would put a hand over her shoulder without turning and draw him down to her. And——

Gordon muttered an apology to the pedestrian he had jostled and came to with a start. He had seen the face of the woman on the hearth and lo, she was Peggy-in-the-Rain!

VIII

LEONA MORRILL was at dinner that evening, but almost the length of the table separated them, and it was only later, in the hall, that Gordon found an opportunity to speak to her. Leona and Mrs. Morrill, attended by Tommy Tupence, were leaving early, and she was already cloaked when he reached her. Since there were others around them, they shook hands.

"Have you relented yet?" he asked.

She raised her brows languidly. "Relented?" she repeated.

"Repented, if you like," he replied with a smile.

"You still remember—at the end of a fortnight? The lady must have made a real impression on you!"

"She did. I hope she is well."

"I believe so. I haven't seen her since she left me at Aiken."

"I wish you'd be generous."

"To her?"

"To me. If you think you oughtn't to tell me her name, will you write to her and ask her permission?"

"Is it as bad as that?" she mocked.

"Well, I'm—very much interested in her, Leona."

"Can't you find some one in your own set to be—interested in?"

Tommy laid a persuasive hand on Gordon's arm. "You're blocking traffic, old chap."

"Hello, Tommy. Good evening, Mrs. Morrill. Won't you try to persuade Leona to be kind to me?"

Mrs. Morrill, stout and good-natured, struggled with her gloves, beaming archly at the petitioner. "Fancy any one being unkind to you, Mr. Ames! What have you done to him, dear?"

"Merely refused him something that wouldn't be good for him, mamma."

"But why not let me be the judge of that?" asked Gordon.

"You're not a good judge, Gordon."

"Then you won't?" he asked dejectedly.

She shook her head, smiling. Tommy Tupence, his face convulsed with his efforts to fathom the conversation, glanced at his watch. Mrs. Morrill nodded to him and laid her gloved hand on Leona's elbow.

"Perhaps she will think better of it, Mr. Ames," she said. "Let her reflect. Come, dear."

Gordon said good night and watched them go through the big copper-grilled glass doors with a frown.

"Hang it," he muttered. "I'll find out now if only to get the best of her!" He went in search of Peter Waring, and a few minutes later they were speeding toward the theater, Peter grumbling because he feared they had missed the first act entire. They had, as it proved. As, however, the last act failed to please them Pete forgot his regrets. After the play they dropped in at Rector's, where, over coffee, Benedictine and cigars, Gordon suddenly demanded:

"Pete, what do you think about honesty?"

Peter looked a little startled. "Why," he replied, "it—it's a good thing."

"Well, is it practical nowadays? Can one be honest and get along?"

"Why not? I'd say it was easier to be honest than dishonest, Gordon."

"I think it is for you, old man. You're about the—well, the squarest chap I know." Peter colored faintly with embarrassment. "But you don't get up against any problems. If you were in business, Pete, I'll bet you'd go bankrupt in a month."

"I don't see it," said Peter stoutly. "Business isn't different from anything else. A chap acts square in anything, doesn't he?"

"Some, perhaps. No, he doesn't—not if it's business. The trouble isn't with the man, it's with business itself. Business seems to me to be just another name for dishonesty. There are men who wouldn't think of double-crossing a friend in the ordinary relations of life, who'd shoot themselves rather than cheat at cards, who'd be as square as a block with a woman, Pete. Put that same man in business and he'd cheat the eye-tooth out of his dearest friend!"

"Piffle!"

"By gad, no, it isn't piffle! It's the lamentable truth, old man. Why, hang it, I'll bet there's graft in even a Bible society! Only they don't

call it cheating or grafting; they call it 'business.'"

"Well, maybe. Glad I'm not in business, then. Glad you're not, too."

"But I am, and that's what makes me mad. So are you to a lesser extent. You rent your buildings, don't you?"

"A chap does it for me," said Pete.

"Well, how do you know that you are dealing honestly with your tenants?"

"Because if I wasn't I'd knock that chap's damned block off!"

"Then knock it off. Afterwards look into things and you'll find you were justified. My business is railroading. You'd think a big system like the C. and W. could be run honestly and make enough money to satisfy the stockholders, wouldn't you?"

Peter blinked. "I'm satisfied with what I get."

"Yes, and you get what you do because—or in spite—of the fact that the road is run like any other business."

"Oh, I say, old man!"

"Fact, though. And I'm not telling you anything you won't learn for yourself in a week or

two. They're after us now, the Government. We've been rebating and juggling cars and all the rest of the damned programme. Oh, they all do it—until they get found out. And even if we get punished we'll go on doing it—in another way. Squeeze the public, jump on the small shipper, doctor the rates—and fill the pockets of the shareholders!"

"What's it for? Can't you make enough without it?"

"Yes, or I believe we can. But you can't convince the directors. They don't want to be convinced, hang 'em! They'd rather get a dollar by some underhand 'business' methods than get two dollars by being plain honest. It's a good road, too. I'm fond of it. My dad made it; bought here and there, built connections, fought the Mardens for four years and won, and finally created the finest railroad system in the world. And now it's being run by a lot of—of vultures who don't give a continental cuss what becomes of the road as long as it fills their damned purses. I've a mind, Pete, to——"

He paused and puffed savagely on his cigar.

Peter maintained a sympathetic silence. Gordon dropped his cigar in the ash-tray.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go home. I want to walk."

They left Broadway behind them and crossed to the Avenue, an almost deserted and silent canyon above whose rims the stars shone white in a purple April sky. They walked in silence for a while. Then,

"I've a good mind, Pete," Gordon continued quietly, "to oust the whole lot of 'em, to put my own directors in and see if a railroad system can't be run honestly and still make money. Sounds a bit—quixotic, eh?"

"Sounds like horse-sense," growled Peter.

"It would be a fight," reflected Gordon aloud. "Some of 'em would struggle like fiends before they'd let go. Why, hang him, even Lovering smiles at me sadly and shakes his head when I talk about honesty. And he'd be horrified and insulted if I so much as hinted that he wasn't the—the personification of probity!"

"He's a deacon in his church," murmured Peter mildly.

"Why, I'd trust him with anything I've got—outside of business, Pete! But there it is. 'Make a clean breast of it,' I said yesterday. 'Tell 'em we've done this and that and are ready to take our medicine. Tell 'em we'll behave after this. What's the use of having an investigation with the papers full of it?' He was terribly distressed. 'It would never do,' he said. 'No, no, we must fight it out. There are interests that can be reached; it's quite probable that the Commission will act—er—discreetly; after all our methods have been only those universally followed; let us sit snug and—er—see what happens.' That means that there's to be dirty, underhand work at Washington, and a raft of money spent in an effort to hush it all up, or, failing that, to get off easily. Got any money not working, Peter?"

"A little, I guess. How much do you want?"

"*I* don't want it; *you* do. You're going to be a director of the C. and W., old man, and it will cost you something."

"All right," said Peter. "Let me know when you're ready."

IX

"WHAT reason does she give?" asked Gordon.

"None." Mrs. Ames laid the two letters beside her plate and helped herself sparingly to the tenderloin fillet. "I suppose it's her pride. Her mother was always just the same way." She took up the briefer of the two communications and sniffed. "Purple ink, too! There's nothing more vulgar than purple ink. She says—let me see——" Mrs. Ames held her lorgnette between her eyes and the offending note—"She says: 'My dear sir: Your letter of the 29th informing me that a sum of money has been placed in your hands for investment for my benefit has been received. There is evidently some misapprehension as to my financial condition. Please say to the person you represent that I appreciate the kindness, but must refuse the charity offered. Any remittances sent by you will be promptly returned. Very sincerely, Margaret Milburn.' I knew her

name was Margaret," added Mrs. Ames with mild triumph.

"But she does give a reason, you see," said Gordon. "She as much as says that she doesn't need the money."

"That's not the real reason. She does need it. Mr. Lovering has made inquiries. I told you that. She simply suspects where the money comes from and won't have it. Well, I feel that I have done all I can, Gordon. Don't you think so? Or would you—persist?"

"In face of that purple throw-down?" laughed Gordon. "Well, hardly, mother. I think you've done your duty. By the way, you say the young lady is employed. What does she do?"

"What was it he said?" Mrs. Ames knitted her brow. "Oh, yes, she does something on a newspaper; writes, I think."

"Then perhaps her reason is the real one, Mums. I've heard that those newspaper women make very good money. Anyhow, I rather admire her pluck. Let's hope she won't regret it later."

"Hm." Gordon smiled discreetly. It sounded as though his mother rather hoped she would regret it. "I fancy she's a little—a little common,

Gordon. There's the ink, and then being on a newspaper—I remember a young woman who came to see me last fall about the upset at the hospital. She represented the—the—well, anyway, it was one of the respectable papers. But she didn't seem at all a nice sort of person."

"I suppose there are all kinds in that business, as in all others."

Mrs. Ames glanced through the second letter. "Mr. Lovering asks what he is to do about it."

"Tell him to drop it," answered Gordon with a shrug. "You can't force the young lady to accept an annuity. Perhaps if you'd offered her the ten thousand—was it ten?—outright she'd have been better pleased."

"But that would be absurd! Fancy giving a young girl ten thousand dollars to do as she pleased with! Why, she would spend it all at once, I've no doubt; gowns and hats and jewels."

"But think of the fun she'd have," mused Gordon, smilingly. "It would be a regular fairy story for her, wouldn't it? Like waking up on Christmas morning when you're a kiddie and finding the bed all heaped up with toys. I say, Mums, let's try her on the whole lump?"

"Do what, Gordon?"

"Let's offer her the ten thousand and see what happens. I'll bet she'd jump at it. Cash in hand looks so different from a prospective income. What do you say?"

"Perfectly absurd, Gordon! Why, it might be the ruin of the child? So much money all at once——"

"Oh, I say, Mums! Ten thousand!"

"Ten thousand would be a great deal of money to her, Gordon. I wanted to help the girl. Giving her a sum of money outright might accomplish a directly opposite result, my dear. Of course, if one could be certain that she is—well, sensible and provident——"

"That wouldn't be hard to learn," said Gordon. "You might commission me to look the young lady up—and over."

"I suppose, however, that since Thomas Milburn died—and even while he was alive—they never had much money. Besides, persons in poor circumstances have absolutely no idea, as a rule, how to use their money. They do spend it so—so wastefully!"

"I know." Gordon nodded sympathetically.

"Jewels—yachts—grouse moors; oh, it's a sin!"

"You may jest about it, my dear, but it's really so. They speak of the wealthy class being extravagant, but it's really the poor people and the people with a little money who are extravagant. I've observed and I know. It's the real reason why the poor stay poor and the wealthy remain wealthy."

"But they don't," Gordon smiled. "That is, the poor don't stay poor. It's the poor who become eventually the wealthy."

"That used to be so, Gordon, but it's becoming less and less the rule every year. Look about you and see. Wealth is becoming more firmly intrenched all the time, and before very long—not in my time, nor yours—it will be impossible for the poor to move out of their poverty."

"My dear mother, you sound absolutely socialistic!"

"I don't sympathize with socialism," replied Mrs. Ames, shaking her head. "Equal distribution of wealth is impossible until all men are born with the same brains and ability. Distribute wealth equally to-day and to-morrow you'll have a rich class and a poor class again, just as now. I

believe that it must always be that some persons must have greater possessions than others. The hope for the future is that those whose wealth gives them power will learn to realize the obligations of wealth and so use that power wisely and mercifully; not only mercifully, my dear, but helpfully. When that time comes there should be no poverty as we know it to-day, no ignorance and filth, no hovels to breed disease. There will be poverty, but not want nor misery."

"And this is to be brought about by the continued centralization—is that the word? no,—the continued accumulation of wealth by the wealthy? My dear Mums, you have a wonderful faith in human nature!"

"I have faith in civilization and education," she replied gravely. "Science is teaching us all the time. We are learning something new and wonderful every year. Just now we are learning that crime is a disease and that the disease may be stamped out in time by applying the principles of the science they call eugenics. Disease and crime and poverty go hand in hand, and in time science will do away with them all."

"That's a bit of a load for science, isn't it?

What about religion? What part is religion to play in this—this regeneration of the human race, Mums?"

"Less than it should, I fear. It must join hands with science before it can attain any creative power. Now it is like a mole burrowing into the earth and refusing to see light. It is fighting science instead of aiding it. I am a religious woman, Gordon, and I believe that we must always have religion. Man can't live without a belief in a God. We are only little children, the strongest of us and the weakest, and like children we want to feel that Someone is caring for us, loving us, waiting to comfort us when we are hurt. Some day religion will come out of the earth and it won't be a mole any more, but a giant walking upright with its head in the clouds. And all these things will come to pass some day, unless——"

"Unless?" prompted Gordon eagerly.

"Unless the Being who created our world for us takes it away from us first."

Gordon sighed. "My dear mother," he said, "you make me feel distressingly shallow-minded, for I've never given a thought to the future of society, or to the part that Science and Religion

are to play in it. May I ask very humbly where you acquired all these startling—for they're startling to me, I confess—all these startling and interesting theories?"

Mrs. Ames smiled. "Some of them were your father's, Gordon. Some of them are my own. Those that are mine I've got by reading and listening and observing. You are too young yet to bother your head with such things, I suppose. By and by, though, you will evolve a theory of your own. I don't know what it will be, but you'll have it. A theory that explains things to your own mind, at least, is a great comfort when you get on in years. It's like having something solid under your feet, something to stand on, if you see what I mean."

"Yes, I understand," replied Gordon thoughtfully. "And I rather like your—platform, Mums. It sounds hopeful. I confess that you're more optimistic about the ultimate result than I am—or should be if I stopped to consider it—but optimism costs no more than pessimism, and I guess it wears better. Some day, when I don't have to journey to Brooklyn to see about having

a yacht put in commission, I shall sit at your feet and learn more wisdom, Mums."

His mother shook her head smilingly as Hurd pulled back her chair for her. "You'll get your wisdom in living, Gordon, and not by listening to an old woman gabble. Will you hand me those letters, Hurd? Thank you. Dear me, has the clock got out of order again?"

"No, madam," replied Hurd. "It is quite correct."

"What! Almost twenty minutes to three! My good gracious, Hurd, why didn't you tell me? Why, I told Tolland to be at the door at half-past two."

"Yes, madam, he is waiting."

"I shall be late at the meeting, Gordon! This is your fault. You let me talk and talk and talk, like—like a phonograph!"

"Not at all," laughed Gordon. "A phonograph talks in a circle and you haven't done that."

"Well, that's one comfort," grumbled his mother. "Shall I see you at dinner?"

"Not this evening, Mums. I'm dining at the club."

"And you think——" Mrs. Ames glanced at the letters in her hand—"I had better do nothing more about this?"

"I wouldn't. After all, charity may seem degrading to the recipient. Let the girl keep her self-respect. I dare say she won't starve. If she does she'll be doing it like a true sport!"

X

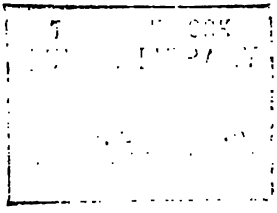
GORDON walked across town to the garage, two blocks from the house, and found his big, gray underslung roadster awaiting him. Peter Waring had promised to go along, but at the club there was only a hurriedly scrawled note saying that Peter had been kidnapped by his sisters and forcibly conveyed up Westchester way for luncheon.

"Darn sisters anyway," wrote Peter, with a fine disregard for punctuation. "They're always hashing things up for a fellow aren't they? I'll see you at the club at seven."

So Gordon made the journey to Brooklyn alone, spent an hour or more at the basin in looking over the *Siren*, one hundred and eighty feet of speed and luxury, and in conferring with his sailing master, and then sped homeward. It had already sprinkled once, a five-minute downpour from a sunny April sky, and now, as he hummed across

the bridge, it began again. Northward the sun was gleaming on white sails and sparkling on the water, but overhead a purple-gray cloud was moving up from the south, and from it in the still air the rain plashed straight down in big lazy drops. Gordon stopped and slipped on a rubber coat, and then, the shower increasing to a very respectable downpour meanwhile, slid into the busy traffic on the Manhattan side and worked cautiously over slippery pavements toward Fifth Avenue. The cloud had grown and the city was enveloped in a false twilight of falling raindrops and dim reflections. The afternoon was mild and soft, hinting at May, scarcely a week distant, and the shower, hissing against the stones and flooding the gutters, drew forth a pleasantly earthy smell. Above the roofs the white steam writhed and floated in billowing festoons. Here and there in some basement shop a light appeared, splashing the gloom with lemon-yellow radiance. As he turned into the Avenue his gaze, wandering idly under a dripping awning on the corner, caught sight of a figure there. The big wheels hissed on the wet asphalt as the car came to a stop within its length. Gordon leaped out and hurried back.

"As he turned into the Avenue his gaze caught sight of a figure there."



She had not seen him, it seemed, for she was standing, back toward him, one of a group of six or eight persons caught unprotected in the shower and marooned under the tiny awning. She was in black and looked smaller than he remembered her. His heart was pounding like a runner's as he took off his cap and put out his hand to her.

"Peggy-in-the-Rain!" he said softly.

She looked up with startled eyes. There was no instant of unrecognition; she knew him at once. Afterwards he strove to recall her expression, but failed. The memory of the meeting was very blurry. At the moment he was conscious of scarcely more than his own feelings, strangely happy and triumphant. She gave him her hand and smiled up at him, while a little warmth of color crept into the pale cheeks.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," he said joyfully, "but I should have known that when I found you it would be like this—in a shower! What do you do with yourself when the sun shines, Peggy-in-the-Rain?"

She drew her hand from his—he was honestly surprised to find he was still holding it!—and shook her head. "That's my secret," she an-

swered. She became suddenly aware of the curious glances of the persons huddled around them. "Have you been back long?" she asked hurriedly, drawing away from him a little.

"From Aiken? Some time. I left about a fortnight after you did. Do you know that I looked all over the place for you, hunted you high and low? And then, when I finally got news of you, you'd gone! You didn't play fair!"

She smiled, looking away. "It's you who aren't playing fair, Mr. Ames. I thought we agreed that—that a thunderstorm wasn't sufficient introduction."

"You may have agreed; I didn't," he replied laughingly. "I went back there the next afternoon and rode for weeks looking for The Lady and The Tiger."

"The Lady—Oh!" she laughed. "That's quite clever."

"It's nothing to what I can do if I have an inspiring audience."

"Meaning that I'm not?"

"Meaning that you are! Meaning that if you'll let me perform for you I'll be as—as amusing as—well, Eddie Foy and Richard Carll and the

best of them are mere gobs of gloom beside me! What do you say?"

"It sounds tempting," she replied lightly, "but I'm a very busy young person, Mr. Ames, and these are my work days."

"But you can't work all the time," he insisted. "You must have some hours of play."

"Not very many. And when I have sleep looks better to me than amusement. And besides——"

"Well?" he asked as she paused.

She looked up at him gravely. "Have you forgotten what I told you that day—in Aiken?"

"Never! I remember every word you spoke, every glance, every smile and—every frown. There were a lot of frowns, Peggy-in-the-Rain."

"Please don't call me that," she said. "I—we were silly that day——"

"I deny it! We were wise! Besides, I like that name—Peggy-in-the-Rain. I think I shall always call you that," he added softly.

The color crept back into her cheeks, but she frowned impatiently. "You are not behaving—very well," she murmured. "I asked you not to."

"Then tell me another name and I'll try to call you by it—if I like it."

"You know my name," she said, faintly indignant.

He looked puzzled. "Peggy, you mean?"

"My last name, of course."

"Oh, but I don't! I want to! What is it, please?"

She smiled scornfully. "At least be truthful, Mr. Ames!"

"Truthful? What do you mean? Don't you believe me? I give you my word that I haven't any more idea what your last name is than—than that truck horse!"

She viewed him doubtfully. "But — I thought——" She paused confusedly.

"What did you think, please?"

"Nothing. That is, I thought—Leona Morrill had told you."

"Then you know that I asked her? She told me only a night or so ago that she hadn't seen you."

"She hadn't then. I lunched with her yesterday."

"But surely she didn't tell you that she'd told me your name? She wouldn't tell me a thing. She said you—didn't want me to know. Didn't you?"

She shook her head.

"Why?" he asked. And then, as she made no answer, "Why?" he repeated.

"You know why," she replied finally, lifting a rather defiant face to him. "I told you—that day. You have forgotten, it seems, after all."

"Oh, that!" he said carelessly. "About our not being in the same bunch. That's no reason at all."

"It's a very good reason," she returned. "Such a good reason that had I seen you coming I'd have run. What do you suppose people who know you by sight—and most every one in New York does, I guess—what do you suppose they think when they see you talking to me here on a street corner?"

"Think? Let them think what they like! Besides, I don't want to talk to you on a corner, Heaven knows! Let's go somewhere where we can be comfortable; Martin's—the Hoffman—anywhere. My car's over there. I'll find an umbrella for you and we'll be under cover in no time. Shall we? Please be kind! If you only knew how I've looked for you ever since I got back to town, Peggy-in-the-Rain!"

"You refuse to understand," she sighed. "If you don't care what they might think, Mr. Ames, I do. So please let's say good-by."

"Good-by!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Now? When I've just found you at last? You don't really mean it! Why—why, hang it, there isn't going to be any good-by—ever! Don't you *feel* that?"

The blue eyes dropped troubledly. She turned away, one hand clutching at her skirts. "I must go now," she said.

"In this rain? Good Lord, you can't! You'll get sopping wet! Wait, please! What is it you want me to do? I don't understand, I guess. Do you really mean that I'm not to—to see you, not to have anything to do with you? Just because you—because I—Why, it's absurd! You can't be in earnest! You aren't, are you? You're just teasing me?"

"I am in earnest," she answered stoutly. "I mean just that."

"But—look here, I'm not a villain in a melodrama, Miss—Miss Peggy! I'm only asking you to let me be a friend. Can't you do that? I thought—well, you know you do rather like me;

you must, or you wouldn't have been so decent to me that day in the woods. So where's the harm, please, if you let me see you now and then and talk to you? Why shouldn't we go to Martin's for tea; Martin's or any other place you suggest?"

She was silent a moment. Then she raised her eyes and looked at him with a little smile trembling about her lips. "And this friendship," she asked, "how does it end?"

"Friendship doesn't end," he answered.

"And how will you explain to your friends when they see us having tea together at Martin's?"

"There is no explanation necessary. Is it an unusual thing for a chap to take a lady to tea?"

"And if they ask my name, who I am?"

"I shall tell them. But you're making a mountain——"

"And if any one who knows me asks who you are—no, they wouldn't do that, for they'd know. But if they asked why I was with you?"

"You'd tell them because I was your friend."

"Yes." She smiled ironically. "They'd be quite willing to believe that without my telling them."

Gordon flushed. "Then damn such friends!" he exclaimed savagely. "A real friend wouldn't think the rottenest thing possible!"

"One's friends are of all kinds," she answered sagely. "No, I'm not anxious for—the notoriety that would be mine if I did what you propose. I know New York pretty well, Mr. Ames; my work has shown me all sides of it; and I know that friendship between a man in your position and with your wealth and a woman such as I is impossible; at all events, for the woman! But we can be friends, can't we, even if we don't see each other? You're rather nice and I do like you, just as you said, and I shall like to think that we are friends." She smiled frankly and held out her hand to him. "And now I really must get on. I've loads to do, and the shower is almost over."

He took her hand and held it tightly. "No," he said, "that won't do. I won't keep you now if you must go, but this isn't good-by. I give you fair warning, you see. You aren't rid of me as easily as that, Peggy-in-the-Rain."

"You—you're selfish," she answered sadly, trying to pull her hand away.

"Perhaps. Anyhow, I'm truthful. I said I

wanted your friendship. I don't. I want—more than that, Peggy. And—this isn't good-by." He released her hand.

"It *is* good-by," she said desperately. "I shall never see you again! Please understand that! Never!"

Her eyes met his, frightened and angry. He smiled back into them. "That's not with you," he answered calmly. "It rests with the gods, perhaps with Jupiter Pluvius. I think we shall meet again. I don't even know your name, nor ask it, so confident am I."

"You've made me hate you," she cried defiantly. "I want never to see you!"

"Then pray to Jupiter, Peggy-in-the-Rain!"

He watched her hurry over the crossing, watched her until she was lost in the throng almost a block away. The rain had ceased and westward a faint yellow glare told of sunset. Up and down the Avenue the lights shone steely blue. Gordon sighed, frowned and went back to his car. With the motor started he paused to light a cigarette and smiled to find his fingers trembling.

XI

BUT the next morning his confidence had waned, and, seated alone at the breakfast table—his mother never came down in the morning—with a litter of papers and mail about him, he called himself several kinds of a fool, addressing his remarks sotto voce to the silver coffee-pot which purred enticingly over its blue flame. He had got out of bed feeling on edge, and neither his mail, largely composed of begging letters, invitations to subscribe to various charities and glowing offers of investment securities, nor the morning papers had added to his happiness. The papers were full of the Commerce Commission's probe into the methods of the Central and Western Railway. It was a nasty mess, and Gordon frowned and muttered as he glanced through news stories and editorials. A financial journal, actuated by friendly motives, stated that the Administration could scarcely afford at

present to antagonize the powerful interests behind the Central and Western system, adding with optimistic naïveté that the opinion was current at the Capitol that the Commission would be persuaded to delay the inquiry until Autumn at least. The "yellow" sheets clamored for "a full and impartial probe into the high-handed and unlawful methods of the Ames System." (A week later one at least of these sheets changed its tune. It doubtless had a good reason.) Gordon wondered helplessly how his father would have dealt with such a situation, realizing the next moment that had Patterson Ames been alive the situation would never have arisen. His scheme to wrest the conduct of affairs from those at present in power looked, in the wan light of a rainy morning, chimerical to the point of absurdity. After all, could he do any better in the conduct of the road's affairs? Of the practical side of railroading he knew almost nothing. He cursed his ignorance and the inertia of helplessness that came from it. This morning he was all for letting well alone. Perhaps Lovering and the others were right, and the methods he had on several occasions tentatively suggested were impractical. And then, at

a tangent, his thoughts for the fiftieth time, flew off to a slim little black-gowned figure seen against a silvery curtain of rain, to a pair of violet-blue eyes that seemed to hold in their depths all the mysteries of life.

He called himself a fool for letting her go without discovering her name, where she lived. Yesterday he had believed the absurd things he had said, believed that the Fate which had thrown them together twice would do so again. To-day he frowned at his confidence and had scant faith in Fate's administration. His feeling for the girl was not love. She pleased him, fascinated him, excited him, piqued his curiosity. He wanted her and meant to have her, and he never doubted that ultimately she would come to him. He was too wise to expect her to fall into his arms at once; he wouldn't have it so; but in the end—well, she liked him already; she had owned to that, and he had seen it for himself; and sooner or later Youth rebels against poverty and lovelessness. He was ready to make any concessions save marriage. Pushing aside an almost untasted breakfast, he arose to tramp the length of the big dining-room, hands in pockets and a frown on his face. She

should have anything she wanted, anything in his power to give. Of course, in such cases, the woman sacrificed more than the man; all the wealth in the world could never quite make up for what she yielded; but it was the woman's lot to do it, she always had and always would while the world spun. And "respectability" couldn't keep a woman from growing faded, couldn't give her beautiful things, couldn't save her from loneliness and heartaches, couldn't even provide bread and butter!

At the broad window he paused and threw aside the heavy draperies impatiently. Below him a little space of grass showed the first adventurous spears of the crocuses. Beyond the grass stood a high fence of ornamental iron. Beyond that was the side street, rain-beaten, puddled. The Avenue was visible for half a block. A big touring car swept by, its curtains closed tightly against the pelter of rain. A hansom followed, one of the few survivors of a dying race. Behind the half-drawn glass Gordon caught a glimpse of a man and a girl. Something that was almost a shiver went over him and his pulses raced furiously for a moment. If only it were he and Peggy there in the

hansom! And why not? What was youth for if not for love and its pleasures? What was wealth for if not to be obeyed? He would find her, find her now, at once, his Peggy-in-the-Rain! What were all her silly objections weighed against his want of her, her want of him? For she did care for him, she must care for him. And if she cared——

A vision of her face came to him, her shadowy eyes raised as they had been raised yesterday, half-frightened, half angry. His heart stirred and he smiled tenderly.

"Ah, but I'll be good to you, Peggy-in-the-Rain," he murmured. "So good to you, dear!"

And then the realization that he neither knew who she was nor where to find her obtruded and he felt sick with a sense of powerlessness. What a fool he had been with his silly heroics yesterday! Why, he might not find her for days, for weeks! He might never find her! Might never see her again! The thought was intolerable, producing a veritable panic of despair until he cast it off with a grim tightening of his lips and a grimmer resolution to find her at any cost. After all, New York was but a small place. Why, he might run

into her to-day or to-morrow! And if not, there was still Leona Morrill. And if Leona still refused, why, there were detective agencies! But he wouldn't go to one of those until every other means had failed. Of course, Leona's mother knew who Peggy was, and probably her father as well, but Gordon didn't doubt that they had each been sworn to silence. The Morrill servants might be bribed, but aside from the caddishness of it, he felt that he had virtually bound himself not to seek his information in that manner. First of all, then, to see Leona again!

Hurd came in with noiseless steps to clear the table.

"Let me have those letters over here, will you, Hurd?" Gordon asked. He seated himself by the window, drew a pencil from his notebook and went over the correspondence on the broad arm of the chair, marking some of the communications with an O, others with an X and crumpling up the rest. At eleven Miss Creed would come and attend to them, inditing polite negatives in her copper-plate hand to the X's and equally polite affirmatives or acceptances to the O's. An invaluable person, Miss Creed, attending to both

Gordon's and Mrs. Ames's correspondence, keeping the latter's accounts, both personal and household, and scheduling her engagements. There were two invitations in his mail, and Gordon wanted to decline them both, but ended by marking them for acceptance and noting them in his book; at one or both of the houses he was fairly certain to meet Leona Morrill.

"Hurd," he said, as he gathered the letters together, "if you wanted to find some one in New York how would you go about it? I mean, of course, if you didn't know where they lived."

"Well, sir, there's the directory."

"Um, yes; but supposing you didn't know the —the gentleman's last name?"

Hurd considered, thoughtfully regarding the vase of golden daffodils in his hand.

"Well, sir, that would complicate matters."

"Yes. Consider them complicated, Hurd. Then what would you do?"

"I think, sir, I'd advertise in the *Herald*."

"Um."

"Has the gentleman a place of business, sir?"

"Er—yes, I think so, but I don't know where

it is or what the business is. Further complications, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I'd say advertise, Mr. Gordon."

"But how the dickens— Look here, I can't say 'If the gentleman named Peggy, last name unknown, will—'" The butler's expression of surprise, momentary but acute, brought Gordon to a stop and a hurried explanation. "Yes, funny name, isn't it? It's just—just a nickname, you see."

"Yes, sir," replied Hurd, expressionless now of face and voice. "It would be difficult in that case, sir."

"Damned difficult! Supposing, then, we cut out the advertising project. Then what?"

Hurd set the flowers on the sideboard the better to give his full mind to the problem. Hurd's father, an estimable English gardener, now deceased, would have scratched his head frankly and inelegantly. Hurd, quite as estimable and more polished, stroked his chin, thereby perhaps supplying the same stimulus.

"Does—does the gentleman want to be found, sir?"

"I wonder!" Gordon studied that question a moment. Finally, "Let us suppose that he is not averse to it, Hurd," he replied. "Then what?"

"Well, it makes a difference, Mr. Gordon, and that's why I made so bold as to ask," explained Hurd apologetically. "If a man doesn't want to be found it's pretty hard to find him in New York, sir. In a case of that sort I'd put the matter in the hands of the police."

Gordon shook his head. "A bit vulgar, eh, Hurd?"

"Perhaps, sir. Then there's private detectives, sir; very smart some of them, I've heard; and very discreet, sir."

"Well, I suppose it comes to that, Hurd," said Gordon with a sigh. "I like the idea of advertising, but when you don't know the la—the gentleman's name—— Look here, Hurd, I might as well tell you that it's a lady I have in mind."

"Thank you, sir. That ought to make it easier."

"Really? And why?"

Hurd coughed discreetly behind his hand and hesitated a moment. "Begging your pardon, Mr. Gordon, but the ladies usually *want* to be found,

sir, if you see what I mean. Intending no disrespect to the lady that's lost, Mr. Gordon."

"All right. But, hang it, I'm not at all sure this lady *does* want to be found!"

Hurd's expression showed that to his mind that put an entirely different complexion on the affair; in short, that matters were again complicated. He coughed dubiously.

"Perhaps, sir, an advertisement might do it after all. Suppose you referred to the young lady——"

"*Young* lady, Hurd?"

"Beg pardon, sir. I should have said the lady."

"Very well," said Gordon with a smile. "Go ahead."

"Suppose you referred to the lady as Miss—I think you said Peggy, sir?"

"Quite right; Peggy."

"Referred to her as Miss Peggy Blank, sir, recalling—ah—any incident that might—might let her know you were meaning her, sir——"

"I know the style you mean, Hurd. 'Will young and attractive brunette who noticed handsome, stout gentleman in lobby of New Am-

sterdam Theatre last evening communicate with ardent admirer? Object matrimony.' That's the style, eh?"

"Well, sir, not quite. More like the lawyers' advertisements, sir. More—more respectable, perhaps, Mr. Gordon. 'If Miss Peggy Blank will communicate with the undersigned she will learn of something to her advantage.' Then sign your name, sir."

"The devil! I'm afraid that wouldn't do. So many others would read it, Hurd, besides the young—the lady in question. And I am lamentably susceptible to ridicule. No, I think an assumed name would be better."

"Very good, sir. Perhaps it would be best to let a lawyer do it for you and sign his name to the notice, sir."

"Not a bad idea, Hurd! Distinctly clever! Thank you. And—er—Hurd."

"Yes, sir?"

"Kindly forget our consultation. Especially the lady's name, Hurd."

"Oh, most certainly, sir. Anything else, Mr. Gordon?"

"Nothing else. Here's the mail for Miss Creed.

I'm going out. I may not be home for luncheon."

"Thank you, sir."

Gordon arose and went again to the window, drumming thoughtfully on the pane. Then, "You said that if the lady didn't want to be found it would complicate things, I think?"

"Depending, sir, on how much."

"How much?" asked Gordon, turning from his contemplation of the dreary morning world. "How much what?"

"How much she didn't want to be found, sir," replied Hurd.

XII

HITHERTO quite unknown restlessness pursued Gordon. He knew the meaning of it, but resented it impatiently. No place seemed able to hold him for long. In the morning he was out of the house as early as the duty of sitting through an almost untasted breakfast would allow. He wandered into one club or another only to wander out again. One afternoon he drove his car up and down the Avenue and through the principal cross streets until darkness, his eyes searching the crowded sidewalks, peering into carriages and automobiles and 'buses. Once a brougham passed him near Thirty-fourth Street, and he was shouted at by a traffic officer because he swung his car around short of the street intersection and went racing back to overtake it. And when he ran alongside he found that the likeness which had deceived him was infinitesimal. The girl in the brougham laugh-

ing and talking with a red-faced middle-aged man was no more like Peggy-in-the-Rain than day was like night. His emotion following the discovery was difficult of analysis, being partly relief and partly disappointment, but there had been nothing complicated about the fierce, blind rush of jealousy that had overmastered him when he had first caught sight of the girl. That had been plain and primitive, and it had left him with shaking hands and hot cheeks. He guided his car to the front of a hotel, went inside and dropped into a chair, and while the drink he ordered was being prepared he considered himself with something closely bordering on dismay.

What in Heaven's name had gotten into him? He had been attracted by women before; he had been in love before; one affair had even been for a time rather desperate; but never had a woman taken possession of him as Peggy had. It seemed to him uncanny, and the more he thought of it, the more he realized his subjection, the more uneasy he became. There was a fair leaven of New England caution in his make-up, and the idea of losing control of himself was at once distasteful and alarming. A waiter brought his

drink and he gulped it down eagerly. Gradually it produced a change of mood. The whole thing was absolutely absurd, he told himself. The idea of letting any woman get such a hold on him! Why, he was worse than any silly, love-sick schoolboy! He lighted a cigar, with a smile for his folly, and went out to his car. And in the act of entering his glance fell on a slim, black-clad figure and his pulses pounded and his heart leaped into his throat!

A second look showed that the girl was not Peggy-in-the-Rain, and Gordon cursed himself for an idiot and resolved savagely to stop thinking about her. But in spite of that resolve his eyes searched for her in the gathering twilight all the way back to the club, where, discovering Peter Waring, he worked off a good deal of ill-temper on that good-natured and long-suffering friend.

The next morning there was a meeting of Central and Western directors, and Gordon, seated at the head of the long table listened absently to the proceedings and wrote "Peggy" over and over on the blue blotting-pad before him. The Commission was to proceed with its inquiry, but,

explained Mr. Lovering blandly, there—ah—need be no uneasiness as to the result. Nods of satisfaction went up and down the table and the matter of the quarterly dividend was taken up and put through. After that Gordon signed some papers, accepted an envelope containing a twenty dollar gold piece and took his departure.

So far Leona Morrill had eluded him, but he ran across her that evening at a dance. He put his name down twice on her card, danced the first number and sat out the second. But Leona was still adamant. She apparently took a malicious satisfaction in refusing the knowledge he asked. Gordon, grown desperate, charged her with it, and they parted ill-temperedly. Two days later the *Siren* took aboard a party of eight carefully selected persons and dropped down the coast. But if Gordon hoped to find peace of mind by getting away from New York he was doomed to disappointment. Even the dazzling Miss Standley who, having labored valiantly and failed bravely to make "Winning Winnie" a success at the Metropole, had flatly refused to eke out the season with another vehicle, thereby precipitating a quarrel with Mr. Frohman which was still interesting

the public, failed to distract Gordon. On the second day out Miss Standley—whose given name was Bessie—announced with ludicrous pathos that "Winning Winnie" was child's play compared with "Winning Gordon." At Charleston Gordon received a mythical telegram and headed the yacht sharply around for New York, turning what was to have been a fortnight's cruise into a week's. Peter Waring, who had upset all calculations by paying assiduous attention to the fascinating chaperon, wanted to know why Gordon had bothered with the *Siren*. "You might have taken us over and back on the Weehawken ferry, old chap. Just when we're sort of getting acquainted——"

"Getting acquainted!" sneered Gordon. "Do you call sitting up all night with Mrs. Ferris and drinking wine at four o'clock in the morning over my state-room getting acquainted?"

"Was that your room?" asked Peter mildly. "Grace bet me it was Miss Massey's. Joke on her, what?"

"Look here, Pete, you were supposed to be nice to Alice Roberts and not gallivant about with Mrs. Ferris. Damn it, you said you wanted to get married! You can't marry Grace Ferris, you

simple idiot! She's got a husband and two kids!"

"I know," replied Peter, "but when it comes to choosing a wife I want to do the choosing, Gordon."

"Well, I dare say you do. What of it?"

Peter grinned. "That's the answer," he replied.

"What's the answer?"

"Miss Roberts. She was doing the choosing."

"Piffle!"

"Fact," said Peter gravely. "She almost had me tagged, old chap."

"You're a damned conceited idiot."

"Conceited if you like, old chap; idiot, no. I've played it safe, what?"

"Yes, unless Bob Ferris hears what you've been doing. Then you may get your silly head knocked off."

Peter grinned again. "Say, Gordon, you've got a peach of a grouch, haven't you? What's the matter? Wouldn't she come along?"

"Oh, go to thunder!" growled Gordon. "I'll be glad when I've got the whole bunch of you dumped in New York again."

"Nice, hospitable host you are," mourned

Peter. "And, say, you hypocritical old cuss, I like your cheek, rowing me because I didn't do my duty by that Roberts girl! Why, confound you, why don't you play your own hand decently? Miss Standley has yawned her head off ever since we left home!"

"To the devil with Miss Standley! And you, too! Anyway, we're going home. I've had a telegram——"

"Sure; I know; and I don't wish her any harm, but I hope she chokes!"

"She?" demanded Gordon irascibly.

"Whoever she is," replied Peter calmly. "Trust a woman to spoil the fun somehow or other. Why the dickens don't you run home by rail, hold her hand awhile and come back and finish out the cruise? We'll get on all right, old chap."

"You're a fool four ways from the ace!"

"Well," Peter chuckled, "I'm not fool enough to believe in that telegram!"

XIII

AS has been remarked just once before, I forget by whom, this world is a small place after all. The remark is equally true of New York City. I presume that a mathematician with a stub of a lead pencil and the back of an envelope could speedily figure out for you what chance Gordon had of meeting Peggy-in-the-Rain again. And I dare say the mathematician's result would be very discouraging. However, we don't require the mathematician's services, for within eighteen hours of the time the *Siren* anchored in East River the unexpected and hoped-for occurred.

The *Siren* returned just at twilight on a Friday in the second week of May. The next forenoon Gordon, returning uptown in his car, the chauffeur driving, cried "Stop!" at the top of his voice, threw open the door, and, before the car had ceased momentum, leaped to the pavement between a dray and a Columbus Avenue trolley,

dodged for his life and gained the sidewalk. But at eleven o'clock of a bright spring morning the east side of Broadway at Eighteenth Street is quite likely to be well thronged, and this morning was no exception. Gordon hurried southward, pushing and elbowing, with scant regard for the comfort of his fellow pedestrians, searching the crowd ahead with anxious eyes. He had almost given up hope when, the throng thinning at Seventeenth Street, he saw her walking briskly ahead of him. He caught up to her just as, glancing right and left, she was about to cross to the park. She turned before he could speak and her face paled and the deep blue eyes grew suddenly large and dark. Gordon's own cheeks whitened under their tan, and it was not until her small fingers lay in his insistent hand that words came to him.

"You see," he said then, with a smile that wouldn't stay straight, "I was right. The gods are kind, Miss Peggy-in-the-Rain."

The color crept slowly back into her face as she withdrew her hand. She smiled constrainedly. "Now you know," she said with a voice that, attempting to speak lightly, trembled a little, "what becomes of me when it doesn't rain." She gath-

ered courage by looking away from his eager eyes. "You've discovered my secret, haven't you?"

"Yes," he answered.

Something in his tone brought her glance back swiftly, inquiringly. What she saw brought a little gasp to her breath.

"Yes," he went on meaningly. "I have discovered your secret, Peggy. And it's only fair, for I've told you mine already."

"Yours?" she asked, with a careless laugh that had a break in it. "Have you a secret, too?" She hurried away from danger. "It's been nice to see you again. I suppose you'll soon be off for the summer?" She moved toward the curb. "Good-by, Mr. Ames." She smiled and nodded merrily.

"Oh, but I am going with you," he said. "I'm not going to trust too often to the gods, you know."

She paused uncertainly. Then, "Please don't," she begged earnestly. "I'm on an assignment; I'm already late——"

"Then you must tell me where I can find you. Life hasn't been very—pleasant since I saw you last, Peggy-in-the-Rain."

"Oh, please! Don't let us go through all that again, Mr. Ames! I've showed you how—how impossible it is——"

"Yes, I know."

"Well——"

"Impossibilities don't interest me, Miss Peggy. I want to see you again; I *must* see you again. You must tell me where you live."

She shook her head.

"Then I shall go with you now," he said calmly.

She looked at him appealingly, but found no encouragement in the firm set of his mouth. She looked frowningly down Broadway, swinging nervously the small black bag she carried. Finally,

"I can't have you call on me where I board," she said thoughtfully. "You know why. And I don't want you to come with me now." She hesitated. "Won't you please go away and—and let me alone?"

He shook his head. "I can't do that," he answered simply. "It—it's too late, Peggy, too late for both of us."

"Oh, it isn't!" she cried impatiently. "Please

don't talk so! Why can't you let me be? What have I done to you——"

"You don't want me to let you be, Peggy!" He captured the hand that held the bag. "You're not honest with me! Look at me, Peggy-in-the-Rain, and tell me I'm wrong, tell me you don't care!"

"You are—I don't—oh, please——"

"You don't look at me, though! Look at me and tell me you don't care, Peggy dear! Do that and I'll—I'll go!"

Very slowly her eyes went up to his, faltered, fled and came back. Very dark they were in the pallor of her face. Her lips parted and Gordon bent to hear.

"I . . . don't . . ." she whispered faintly, their eyes holding. He waited. Finally,

"What?" he asked softly.

"Care . . ."

"For——"

"You!" She said it bravely at last and tore her eyes away. She was trembling. Gordon smiled happily.

"Then—I'm to go?" he asked.

She nodded vigorously.

"But say it, Peggy—dear."

After a moment, "You're to . . . go," she said. "Oh, please, please don't make it any harder!"

"Then it *is* hard, Peggy?"

There was no answer.

"Well, I will go," he said after a moment, "for a little while, Peggy."

"But—you said," she faltered.

"That I'd—leave you alone?" he asked with a little laugh. "Yes, but you were to tell me you didn't care, dear."

"I did!"

"No." He shook his head. "The words said it, Peggy, but your eyes—Shall I tell you what your eyes said?"

Again there was no reply. He laughed softly, triumphantly.

"If you must go, Peggy, go. I won't keep you any longer. But you must tell me first where I am to see you again, and when."

"No, this is good-by."

"It is not good-by. There can be no good-by between us, Peggy-in-the-Rain! To-night at

half-past seven I shall be here at this corner in my car. Will you come? "

"I—can't!"

"At half-past seven, Peggy?"

After a long moment she lifted her head tiredly and looked at him with a little wan smile.

"At half-past seven, Peggy?" he repeated.

"Yes," she said quite evenly, "only——"

"Only what, Peggy-in-the-Rain?"

"I think—I hate you," she replied quietly.

He laughed again very softly. "Hate me to your heart's content, dear," he answered, "only come!"

She went slowly over the crossing, a slim, black-clad figure. Gordon, watching, drew a deep sigh and turned away. She would not look back; he knew that. He no longer felt triumphant, only vividly alive and a little bit dizzy, as though he had taken some strange drug. He wanted a drink badly and, taking the wheel, sped the car to the club.

XIV

SHE was quite prompt. Gordon, who had been ten minutes early at the rendezvous, had to wait only a quarter of an hour. Then he saw her half a block away walking quickly, as though, he thought, she feared her courage would desert her if she lagged. His heart quickened and to stifle his agitation he started the motor and swung the car around so that she might step in beside him from the curb. If he expected the girl he had parted from in the forenoon he was disappointed, for this was quite another Peggy who stepped nimbly into the car, with a gay nod of her head, sank into the seat beside him and drew her dark cloak up about her neck.

"Am I late?" she asked briskly. "I tried not to be, but I'm so unused nowadays to going out anywhere that I simply was all thumbs when it came to dressing." She looked at Gordon's attire. "I'm glad you're not in dinner things," she

went on with a note of relief. "I worried about that, for now that I am wearing black I haven't a thing I could have put on. Do you mind my coming in a street gown?"

"Not at all. I—we are going out of town for dinner; I thought you'd prefer it; and dinner clothes aren't necessary." He spoke very formally, puzzled and discomforted by her self-possession.

"Then that's all right," she said cheerfully. "Do you know I had to move heaven and earth to get here, sir?"

"Really?" he asked steering the car dexterously through the traffic in Madison Square and plunging into the half-shadows of the Avenue. "How was that?"

"It was not my night off and I had a regular dickens of a time convincing the city editor that I had to go. I forget whether it was a sick friend or a wedding that I offered for excuse."

"City editor?" he repeated questioningly, "what city editor? Who is he?"

"Why, the city editor of the *Report*, of course. That's my paper, Mr. Ames."

"Your paper?" he asked puzzledly.

She laughed gayly. "But I forget that you don't know. Yes, my paper. I don't own it, you know; I merely work for it."

"Oh, so that's—that's what you do! You're a newspaper woman!"

"Good gracious, don't say it that way! We're not that bad, really!"

"I beg your pardon! I didn't mean——"

"Don't apologize. I quite understand. Some of us are a bit—well, impossible."

"I've never met any. I merely—had an idea——"

"Well, you've met one now. Please say that after this you have the utmost respect and admiration for newspaper women, Mr. Ames."

"I do say it. But—but, look here, what do you do on the paper?"

"Do? What don't I do? I report weddings, funerals, parties, teas, dog shows, prize-fights——"

"Prize-fights!"

"I did once. The editor wanted a story written from the woman's point of view." She laughed reminiscently. "I fear I disappointed him, for I got terribly excited about it and quite forgot that

it was—well, brutal, you know, and went back and wrote a most glowing account of it! I don't think my story made much of a hit with the city editor, but the sporting editor came around the next morning, shook hands with me, told me I was a wonder, and promised me tickets whenever I wanted them! So, you see, it must have been a pretty good story from one point of view, mustn't it?"

"Ye-es. But isn't it—hard work?"

"Terribly." She sighed. "But I like it. And it's what I can do. And, besides, all work's hard, isn't it? But I don't suppose you know."

Gordon frowned.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you have to—to go about and interview people?"

"Oh, yes, but that's fun compared with some of the assignments you get. Sometimes there's a murder that's a little unusual, that promises a human interest side. Then I get that."

"Good God!"

"Yes, it's—not nice sometimes. But usually, after the first shock of—of distaste I get interested in it. After that I like it."

He looked at her in puzzlement. It was dis-

tinctly impossible to associate her with such things, impossible and horrible! She read the thought and laughed.

"Oh, it isn't all murders, Mr. Ames! There are some very nice assignments sometimes; interviews with interesting persons—or personages; 'swell functions,' as our city editor calls them, when I put on my very best bib and tucker and pretend I'm a guest and make notes in the seclusion of the dressing-room or behind a palm so folks won't know why I am really there. That sounds snobbish, doesn't it? I suppose the real fact is that I am a little ashamed of my profession in spite of my—my pose."

He made no answer. This was not Peggy-in-the-Rain, this very capable, self-possessed young woman beside him. He turned again to observe her with a mingling of surprise and curiosity. Once more she seemed to surmise his thoughts, and smiled.

"You're trying to reconcile me with the girl you met under the magnolia that day, aren't you? A very silly, frightened girl who hung onto your hand like grim death and tried so very, very hard to believe the nice lie you told her about magnolias

never being struck by lightning. You are, aren't you?"

He nodded, and then stooped to turn on the electric lights at the dash. "I believe I was," he replied. "And I was thinking how unsuited such a business—profession——"

"Call it career," she suggested lightly.

"How unsuited it is to you; or perhaps I'd better say how unsuited you are to such a career."

"That sounds uncomplimentary, Mr. Ames. Really, I'm not so bad at it!"

He frowned. "You know what I mean. I don't like to think of you running around this town alone, unprotected like that. It isn't right. It's no work for a girl."

"It's the work for this girl. It's the only thing I know how to do, the only thing I could do, I fancy. And it really isn't as bad as you evidently imagine it to be. I don't go on night assignments alone, you see; at least, not where there would be any danger."

"Who goes with you?" he asked shortly.

"One of the boys. Or, rather, I go with him. Sometimes, if the thing is big two or three of us go together."

"And—I beg your pardon—does it—do they pay a good salary?"

"I work on space. Sometimes I make twenty dollars a week, sometimes thirty. Once I made nearly fifty. That was when that Italian woman was charged with murdering her husband. Do you remember? He had four or five hundred dollars in an Italian bank and the police found that she had been making inquiries about the money, apparently trying to find how much it amounted to. They almost sent her to the chair on that evidence. McConnell and Jim Crandall and I worked on that for over a month. It was really Jim who found out about the lover, although the police got the credit for it. They got him in Palermo and brought him back and he confessed."

"And you like that sort of thing!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, I think I do. There are times when—oh, there are always 'times' with every one, aren't there? And it brings me a living, Mr. Ames."

"A living! Fifty dollars a week!"

"Well, let's say thirty to be safe. And then I do a little writing besides; articles and stories for the cheaper magazines, you know."

"Your people, do they like you to do it?"

"I haven't any," she replied simply. "My father died some years ago and my—mother—just recently. There aren't any others."

"I beg your pardon! I didn't understand! It was stupid of me, but I didn't realize that your black meant mourning."

She made no reply and the car hummed across the river and sped northward. There was a chill in the air and he turned solicitously. "Are you warm enough?" he asked.

"Quite." She snuggled more closely into her cloak with a sigh of contentment. "I love it. My automobiles are usually taxicabs, you see."

"Here is one that is always at your disposal," he answered. "And listen; the exhaust; do you hear what it says?"

"Chig-a-chig-a-chig-a-chig," she laughed.

"'Peggy—Peggy—Peggy!' Can't you hear it?"

"What a polite and agreeable car! Does it always repeat the name of the lady who is riding in it?"

"It's going to after this; it's always going to say 'Peggy—Peggy—Peggy—Peggy!' Just as

my heart has been saying it ever since I found you first that day under the magnolia. 'Peggy—Peggy—Peggy!'—over and over."

She laughed softly and amusedly.

"You find amusement in that?" he asked, piqued.

"No, indeed; what you said was very pretty. I was only thinking of a little tot I met once on a train. I was spending a month in the summer with some friends in Virginia and we went over to Berryville for the horse show. Across the car from me was a quaint little girl in a funny little home-made dress. She sat squarely in the middle of the seat, with a bag beside her, and as the train rattled and thumped along she swayed back and forth in time to the song of the wheels, her eyes on space and a seraphic smile on her dear little face. And as she bobbed back and forth she kept intoning just loud enough for me to hear: 'Oh—how — I — love—old—Bae—ville, —old—Bae—ville, —old—Bae—ville! Oh—how—I —love—old—Bae—ville, —old — Baeville, —old —Bae—ville!' Wasn't it dear? I wish, though, I could say Berryville just the way she did. She kept it up for goodness only knows how long! And

then, at 'Baeville' a nice, plump little mother and a grinning, awkward big brother bore her off all smiles and eager questioning."

Peggy, swinging back and forth on the low seat, had mimicked the child so well that Gordon, though a little hurt and chagrined, had to laugh sympathetically. "The dear little kid," he murmured.

Peggy said "There!" in a strange tone and he looked at her sharply. "What?" he questioned.

She was silent a moment. Then,

"I suppose you'll think me silly," she said finally, "but that story is really a test, Mr. Ames. And you said just the right thing. And——" she looked at him, frankly smiling and approving,— "I'm not afraid of you any more!"

"Afraid of me! Were you ever?" he asked.

"Um; a little, I guess; just about that much." She held up a gloved hand in the half-dark, thumb and finger scarcely apart. He was silent a moment.

"I wonder," he said at last, "if you were as afraid of me as I've been of you."

"Afraid of me!" she exclaimed, unconsciously

mimicking him. "Oh, but that's flattering! Fancy any one—at least, any one six feet tall—being afraid of me!"

"I was—perhaps am, Peggy-in-the-Rain. Afraid and—yes, a little bit angry with you. Do you know that you're the first person, man or woman, who has ever made me—miserable?"

"Poor Mr. Ames!" she exclaimed mockingly. "I wonder——"

"What?"

"Whether that's a compliment—or—or what Jim Crandall calls an 'asparagus'!"

"It seems to me this Jim Crandall is occupying a large place in your thoughts this evening."

"Jim? He's a dear!" she replied lightly. "And he's quite the smartest reporter on the Row. I told you how he dug up the real murderer in that case I spoke of. But he's done cleverer things than that even. Three years ago when we had the ballot-box stuffing scandal——"

"Oh, hang Jim Scandal—I mean Crandall!"

They laughed together, Gordon a trifle ruefully.

"It's no joke, Peggy. I can't stand hearing you even talk about any one else." He turned sud-

denly. "Look here," he demanded, his voice dropping, "*is* there any one else, Peggy?"

"Any one *else?*" she repeated lightly.

"Yes, any one else. Is there?"

"No," she answered soberly, "there is no one else. And—there is *no one.*"

He took his hand from the wheel and placed it over hers, folded in her lap under the cloak. "Are you certain, Peggy?"

She nodded slowly. "I don't pretend to not understand you," she replied gravely. "I like you. I'm here now because I like you. But—if that's not enough you must take me home again, or, at least, not try to see me again."

"It is *not* enough, and you know it, Peggy," he replied hotly. "And you knew it when you came this evening. I thought you were beyond quibbling!"

There was a moment's silence. Then, "No woman is beyond what you call quibbling, Mr. Ames," she said. "But if I'm to be quite honest, why, yes, I did know. And I wonder—why I came!"

"Wasn't it because—you cared—a little, Peggy?" he whispered.

"Was it?" she asked thoughtfully. "If I cared would I have come?" She laughed to herself. "Why try to fathom a woman's reason for doing a thing, Mr. Ames? We are handicapped from birth with an infinite capacity for doing the wrong thing."

"Then—you don't care?" he persisted.

"For you—in that way?" she asked. "What can I answer? If I say no—perhaps it won't be true. If I say yes I'm confessing my weakness and wrongness."

"I can't see that!"

"You don't care to. If I really did care I should know better than to come with you tonight. You see that, don't you?"

"If you care, Peggy, why *not* come with me?"

There was no answer for a moment. The car ran swiftly, almost noiselessly between country walls and farms. Overhead the sky was luminous with stars and in their faces a damp breeze hinted of the sea.

"I'll tell you," she said at last. She was looking straight ahead at the road that rushed toward them in the broad glare of the searchlights, and

he surmised rather than discerned the little pucker on her brow. "May I?"

"Yes," he muttered.

"I've seen a good deal of—what we call life, Mr. Ames, and so I'm not—exactly ignorant. Perhaps I oughtn't to say these things to you. I suppose I couldn't if it were light. But it's dark, and I—somehow, in spite of the fact that I've been a little afraid of you sometimes, I—I think you're *nice*, if you know what I mean by that." She seemed to be groping for her words there beside him. He nodded. She must have seen it, for she went on with more confidence. "You say you like me—no, love me. You see, I'm being quite frank. Perhaps you do. Of course, I don't pretend to know much about love. I've seen a good many kinds, but it has never—never touched me. So since there are so many kinds of love—or, because this love has so many different aspects—I'm ready to believe that you do love me. And I think I care for you. Perhaps not—not in quite the same way. I don't know. It is all quite new and different and—and a little bit scary. But I think I do care some. And perhaps if—if this sort of thing went on; if we saw each other, I

mean; why, perhaps I'd really come to care for you a great deal."

"Go on," he said quietly as she stopped.

"Yes. Well, don't you see that's the difficulty? If you could just do all the caring and I—could stay as I am and we could be quite contented together like this, why, it would be pleasant, wouldn't it? But I suppose we couldn't, could we?"

"No," he said hoarsely.

"I suppose not." She sighed. "Then it would mean that—that if I cared for you I'd have to——" She was silent. Finally, "I don't think it is so much what we call disgrace that I'd hate. It would be the contempt I'd feel for myself—afterwards. For there'd be an afterwards. There always is, I guess. You see," she turned for the first time and smiled across the darkness, "you see I haven't said anything about marriage, Mr. Ames."

He was silent.

"Well," she went on presently, "there it is. I suppose—no, I *know* that I shouldn't have come to-night. I knew it when I consented. Don't ask me why I came. Perhaps—perhaps I wanted a

little pleasure. There isn't so much. Perhaps——" her voice faltered—"perhaps it was because—just because I do care—a little."

"Peggy!" he murmured longingly.

"At least you must own that I did try to keep you away. Even that first day there in the woods I seemed to know. And I've played traitor at last—to both of us. For you'll blame me, won't you?"

"Never! There is no blame on either side, Peggy-in-the-Rain. I love you, sweetheart, with every bit of me, and you love me, dear. Isn't happiness something? Is there so much of it in your life that you can turn your back on this? And we could be very happy, dear. For you there would be no more running around the streets, no more nosing about for—for murders. There's almost nothing you couldn't have, dear——"

"*Please!*"

"You're right! I had no business talking that way. And yet all that does help to make happiness, Peggy-in-the-Rain."

"Oh, I wonder! Tell me, you have so much, Mr. Ames, are you happy, really and truly happy?"

"To-night, yes."

"But other times; usually; are you?"

"Is any one ever always happy? Isn't life made up of happy moments and unhappy moments, Peggy? And moments when—when we just go along without being one way or the other? I suppose I'm as happy as most fellows——"

"But if wealth and all the enjoyments that wealth can buy can't make one happy every day——"

"You're right, dear, it isn't wealth that brings happiness; it's love."

"Is it? I wonder again."

"Don't you think we could be happy together, Peggy? I'd be so very good and kind to you, sweetheart, if you'd only let me! We could go away together if you liked; the whole world is open to us. Couldn't we be happy, Peggy?"

"If—if I cared for you as you want me to, yes, for—for as long as it lasted. But——"

"It would last, dear! You're the only woman I've ever really cared about. Will you please believe that? I've been in love—or what seemed love at the time—before; once or twice. I've never—I've kept pretty straight, dear. I'd like you to

believe that, too. I'm glad I have now. Perhaps it wasn't any great merit, for I suspect that there's a little of the Puritan in me, enough to keep me—fairly decent. It *would* last, Peggy. Don't you think it would?"

"Perhaps. One would—would have to risk that. Every woman does."

"I suppose you are thinking that—I might marry. You've been frank with me and I'll be frank with you, dear. Well, I don't want to marry; not for a long while, at any rate. Some day—yes, I suppose I shall. When I do it will be a merger rather than a marriage. My mother is ambitious for me, ambitious for the family. It has always, since I was a mere toddler, been an understood thing that my marriage was something in which she was to have the final say. My father had that idea, too. When it comes it will be the joining of the Ames wealth to another fortune as large. She and I—whoever she is—will be merely pawns in the game. It will be just one of a score of such marriages you and I know of. So there's that. Even if I should marry, dear, it would bring no rival to you in my heart."

"I'm glad you told me about—your mother.

It makes it a little easier. She doesn't consider hearts, does she? "

"She made just such a marriage herself, Peggy, and it turned out happily. Perhaps she thinks such marriages stand just as good a chance of bringing happiness as the other kind. I don't know. We've never talked about it; the event has always been remote. She is a very good mother, one of the very best, Peggy, and she's wise."

"I shouldn't have criticised her," said Peggy. "Perhaps she is right."

"At all events, I believe she thinks she is," he answered. "I suppose my rôle looks rather a mean one. Probably you are thinking that a man might choose for himself——"

"No, I wasn't." She shook her head. "I understand. A big fortune is a sort of trust, I suppose, and those who possess it aren't free to—to do as they will."

"That, at least, is the way my folks look at it. And the same view is taken by other families. Where it will end, God only knows! My mother seems to believe that when all the wealth of the country is at last in the hands of a few the

millennium will be here. I confess I haven't her faith in the—the goodness of humanity. Here's our place. I hope you will like it, dear."

An avenue of young maples wound off from the broad road, and at the end of it lights twinkled welcomingly. Gordon turned the car in and ran in silence over the crunching gravel. At the entrance, where two liveried attendants hurried down the steps, Peggy laid a hand on Gordon's arm.

"I'd like," she said, "to forget now for the rest of the evening. Don't you think we could?"

"I can't forget that I love you, Peggy-in-the-Rain, and want you terribly. But I'll try not to say so if you like."

"Please. I want to—to forget all the problems if I can. I want to just—just be happy for a while."

His hand closed over her hand on his arm. "I believe, dear," he whispered in a voice that was not quite steady, "I believe you are making me love you so much that I'm getting to care more for your happiness than my own. Can love be as unselfish as that, really?"

"I don't know," she faltered, "but—I'm afraid so!"

XV

THEY dined almost alone in a corner of the glassed-in porch. Tubs of palms had been placed about their table and screened them effectively from the other diners. From indoors the strains of an orchestra came softly. Through the glass the waters of the Sound were dimly visible in the starlight, with here and there a ship's lantern pricking the purple darkness with an orange flame. There were flowers on the table, white lilacs and pink roses. The head waiter seated them, gave his orders in undertones to two flurried underlings and presented a slip to Gordon.

"This is what I had arranged, Mr. Ames. Is there anything else, sir? Anything you'd like changed?"

"Not a thing, Burke. It seems perfect."

"Thank you, sir." The head seemed really pleased. "And the wine?"

Gordon glanced again and looked across. "I presume you like a sweet wine?" he asked.

"I think I'd rather not have any, if you don't mind," she answered hesitantly.

"Really? Then make that a pint, Burke. Or, wait. Would you prefer claret, Peggy? Or a sauterne?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Not even a cocktail?" he begged.

"Yes, I think I'd like that; just a weak one."

"Clover Club?"

"Or a Palmetto," she said demurely.

"I'm afraid they don't know that here," he laughed. "Two Clover Clubs, Burke, and just a pint of the '93."

"You telephoned?" she asked when the head had gone.

"Yes. One has to here. It is so far out of the way."

"Then you were pretty sure I'd come, weren't you?"

"No, I was not sure at all. I only played it safe."

"If I hadn't come what would you have done?"

"I don't know. I'd have been horribly disap-

pointed, though. I suppose I'd have telephoned out here and told them to chuck the dinner in the Sound."

"And then?" she persisted.

"Spent the evening thinking about you and—and swearing at you, always most politely." They laughed together. Then she sighed, smiled and, leaning back in her chair, surveyed the place through the branches of the plants.

"It's very pretty," she said. "And what makes it more delightful is that I haven't the least idea where I am? Of course, that, I suppose, is the Sound?"

"No," he answered, shaking his head gravely, "that's the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Lyons."

"And this is Nice?"

"Mentone. We go on to Nice in the morning."

"And Monte Carlo? I've always wanted to see Monte Carlo."

"I had planned for three or four days there," he replied questioningly. She nodded.

"And after that?"

"Well, I had thought up the Rhone and then across into Switzerland, if that pleases you."

She leaned forward eagerly, her eyes sparkling.

"Switzerland! Do you really mean it? Lucerne? And Interlaken? And Mont Blanc? And—and the Matterhorn?"

"We omit nothing—as long as the car holds out."

"The car?" she questioned.

"The automobile. Have you forgotten that we travel by automobile?"

She clapped her hands softly. "How stupid I am! I had forgotten, really! I hope it does hold out, don't you? Still, we could go by train."

"No, the only way to really enjoy Switzerland is by motor. Perhaps afterwards we might slip down into Italy by rail; Lake Como, for instance, must be worth seeing. I have never been there."

"I shall enjoy the mountains more," she said thoughtfully.

They were still pretending when the waiter brought the cocktails. Gordon raised his glass to her across the flowers.

"To that day, Peggy," he said gravely.

She shook her head lightly. "I'm afraid by that time automobiles will be quite out of fashion," she replied laughingly, "and we shall have to make

our trip in an aeroplane. Fancy doing the Alps in an aeroplane!"

"I'll do them in an ox-cart if you'll come with me, Peggy!"

"That *would* be novel! I could write a book about it, couldn't I? 'Up Mont Blanc in an Ox-Cart'; how would that do for a title? I've always wanted to write a book. I started one once and got as far as page forty, I think it was. It was only a novel. A book of travel would be much nicer."

"Tell me about it," he said with a smile. "The novel, I mean."

"I fear I've forgotten it now. It was a good many years ago. I was still under the influence of The Duchess. It was at boarding school, and I used to write at night after the lights were supposed to be out. I remember the story began at Devereux Hall, the country seat of Sir Godfrey Devereux. It was called 'Lady Leona's Secret.' My heroine was named Leona because that was the name of my best friend."

"Leona Morrill?" he asked.

"Yes; I forgot you knew. I liked her better than any of the others at St. Agnes'. I used to

read the story to her as fast as I'd written a page or two, and I remember how excited she got. I think the real reason the story stopped at page forty was because we had our first quarrel then."

"She surely didn't object to being the heroine?"

"Oh, no; what girl would? But I had it arranged that Lady Leona was to marry her old sweetheart, the son of the gamekeeper, who had been to America and who comes back in the third chapter. You see, somebody—I've forgotten who now—was found dead in the copse—or is it coppice?—two years before and the gamekeeper's son was wrongly accused and had to flee. So he comes back in the third chapter so changed that nobody recognizes him. His name—oh, dear, what was his name?"

She gazed frowningly across the table.

"Gordon?" he suggested.

An expression of bewilderment came to her face.

"It was!" she exclaimed. "Gordon Lambert! Now, isn't that the funniest thing? I remember I had the hardest sort of a time finding the right name for him, and finally I came across Gordon,

and it sounded nice and sort of dignified and—and manly, and I named him Gordon!"

"Heroes are always called Gordon," he responded soberly. "Just as heroines are always Peggy. And don't you think it's about time that I knew the rest of your name?"

"I haven't told you yet about our quarrel," she countered. "I had it all planned that Lady Leona and Gordon were to run across each other by accident in the park near the scene of the crime. I thought having it near the scene of the crime was rather clever. Do you?"

"Awfully."

"Thanks. And she was to recognize him with a cry and fall fainting on the velvety turf. I don't think I'd got much beyond that with the details, but in the end she was to marry him, throwing over the Earl of Devereux, who was afterwards killed leading a heroic charge in South Africa. But Leona insisted that she should marry the Earl, and didn't like Gordon a bit. I'm afraid I did make him a little priggish, but I tried to make Leona understand that it wasn't really *she* who was marrying him, but the character in the novel. But she had got it into her head by

that time that she was Lady Leona, and just wouldn't think of Gordon for a minute. Of course, I wanted to please her, but, as I pointed out to her, if Lady Leona married Sir Godfrey Devereux there wouldn't be any plot! So we had a sort of a quarrel. It didn't last more than a day, but it dampened my enthusiasm for novel writing, and I've never tried it since."

They talked about books and writers during the fish course, and when the waiter filled Gordon's glass with champagne the latter again proposed a toast, this time laughingly.

"To the author of 'Lady Leona's Secret'!"

"Never mind," she replied, pretending offense, "you may make fun of it, but it would have been a beautiful book if it had ever got finished. There were places in it that would have brought tears to your eyes, perfectly heartbreaking passages, they were. I know, for I used to cry myself when I wrote them."

"I'd like to have known you then," he said wistfully. "I want to have always known you, Peggy. I don't like to think that you have lived twenty years——"

"Twenty-three, please."

"Without me." He smiled. "I wonder how you managed, Peggy."

"It was very difficult," she sighed. "I was always conscious of a great want, Mr. Ames."

"Don't you think we could do without the 'Mr. Ames,' Peggy?" he asked.

She shook her head. "N-no, I don't think so—yet."

"Then will you tell me your name?"

"Peggy."

"Peggy what?"

"Peggy-in-the-Rain."

"Please!"

"Not to-night. You see, I want you to find me interesting, Mr. Ames, and nothing, I have been told, so interests a man as mystery. I can't hold my own with those beautiful women over there, and I certainly can't count on my costume. So I shall fascinate you by exciting your curiosity."

"You don't need to, dear. There isn't a woman here to hold a candle to you for beauty."

"Charming!" she laughed gayly.

"You don't believe it? Why, Peggy, there isn't another pair of eyes like yours in the world. They're like violets, dear, the big, blue violets

that come in the fall. I've dreamed of them for weeks, Peggy-in-the-Rain! And your cheeks and your mouth, dear, and—oh, girl, I love you, love you!"

He reached a hand across the table to her, but she only shook her head, smiling a little tremulously.

"I thought—we were to forget," she whispered.

"I can't forget! I want you so much, Peggy! Won't you care a little for me? Won't you let yourself care a little, dear? You could if you would, couldn't you? A little, dear?"

Her eyes avoided him as she shook her head gently.

"You promised."

He sighed, withdrew his hand and leaned back in his chair. When, curiosity compelling, she looked up he was frowning at his cigarette.

"I'm sorry," she said penitently. "Have I hurt you?"

His face cleared. "You couldn't," he answered caressingly.

"Oh, yes, I could," she said wisely. "I wouldn't want to, but I could. Perhaps I shall."

"Yes, you could," he agreed. "You could

hurt me more than any one else in the world. I suppose it's those we love who can hurt us most, Peggy."

"And who do," she sighed. Then she shook her slim shoulders and laughed. "Don't let's be sad and serious," she begged. "That's so easy any time. This ice is delicious, isn't it?"

"Is it? I'm glad if it is. I've ordered coffee. You drink it?"

"Yes. And—would it be terribly dissipated to have a glass of cordial?"

"I fancy you could live it down in time. What do you like?"

"I don't know. What do you think would be nice?"

"Crème Violette to match your eyes."

"Oh! But is it good?"

"Sickening," he answered cheerfully. "Try Benedictine." He called the waiter and gave the order. Then, "There is something," he continued musingly, "that I wanted to ask you. It was while you were telling about your novel. Now I seem to have forgotten it. Oh, I know what it was. Do you by any chance know a girl named Milburn? Margaret Milburn? She is a newspaper woman, too, I believe."

Peggy watched the waiter very intently as he poured the coffee into the tiny cups.

"Do you know what paper she is on?" she asked.

"No, I don't. She's a—well, a sort of relation; a rather distant one."

"Yes? Of course there are a good many women working on the papers," she said deprecatingly. "Does she do reporting? Or does she run a department?"

"I don't know that, either. It doesn't matter. I only wondered if you'd met her."

"Then you're not very much interested in her?"

"Not very," he answered smilingly. "Would you care if I were?"

"I'd be horribly jealous—to-night," she answered.

"Why just to-night?"

"Because to-night—is to-night."

"And to-morrow?"

She made a grimace. "To-morrow is something we don't speak of. To-morrow is work, and crowded cars and cross people and the smell of ink and headaches and—and——"

"Peggy, leave it all. I want you terribly and

I'll make you very happy. Look, dear, I won't ask for anything now but the right to care for you and look after you. Just trust me, girl dear. Won't you?"

She shook her head, dipping her spoon in and out of her coffee. "Don't spoil it, please. It's such a nice evening so far."

"There might be so many, many of them, Peggy," he said wistfully, "just as nice. And no more rotten newspapers and tiresome running about town. A home of your own, Peggy, with everything——"

"But a wedding ring?" she asked smilingly.

He flushed. "Is that quite fair?" he muttered.

"Probably not," she replied a trifle cynically. "But are women ever—quite fair?"

"I think you could be very fair."

"Could be, yes; perhaps we all *could* be; but we're not very often. But I'll try to be with you. So I take it back—about the—the ring."

"No, you are right, Peggy," he said gloomily. "I'm a brute. It would serve me right if you never spoke to me again." He drained his glass and studied it a moment moodily before he pushed

it away across the cloth. "I suppose the best thing for me to do is to get away and try to—forget you."

There was no answer and presently he looked across at her. She was leaning with her chin on her clasped hands, her eyes fixed inscrutably on him.

"Isn't it?" he demanded impatiently.

She lowered her gaze. "It would be best for both of us," she answered steadily.

"For both?" he exclaimed eagerly. "My God, Peggy, do you expect me to run away when you talk like that?"

"I don't expect you to run away at all," she replied, smiling gravely. "I don't think you mean to."

His eyes fell. "I would if I thought—it would do any good; if I thought I could forget you," he muttered. She shook her head.

"You won't," she said convincedly.

"It sounds as though you didn't want me to—forget you!" he challenged.

"I don't know—what I want," she answered tiredly. "I know that you ought to forget me, and that I ought to forget you; that if I see you

again I'll be doing what is very unwise, very wrong. What I don't know is—what you'll do or what I'll do."

"Oh, the whole thing's dead wrong!" he exclaimed passionately. "It's all a wretched muddle. I love you, Peggy, as I've never loved another woman, as I never shall love another woman. I wish to God I were as poor as a church mouse!"

The waiter cleared the cloth for the bowls and Gordon watched him miserably. When he was gone,

"You are right," he said with a sigh. "I shan't run away. I couldn't forget you; I don't want to. No, I'm going to stay, Peggy. I—" He sought her eyes—"I am giving you fair warning, Peggy-in-the-Rain."

She smiled sadly as she lifted her gloves. "I gave myself warning that day in Aiken," she replied, "but I didn't heed it."

"Then you do care, dear?" he whispered caressingly.

She shook her head as she pulled on a glove. "I don't know. That is really true; I don't know. I've tried not to care. I don't want to care." Her fingers fumbled at their task and

"'I've tried not to care. I don't want to care.'"

her voice faltered. The blue eyes lifted to his, dark and piteous. "Oh, don't let me!" she whispered. "Please, please help me not to!"

For a long moment their eyes held. Then,

"It's too late, Peggy," he said almost sadly. Where, he wondered, was the ecstasy and triumph he had anticipated?

"It isn't!" she denied vehemently. "Not yet! You've no right to say that! I'm tired and I don't know what I'm saying——" Her voice faltered into silence. She pulled at her gloves with trembling hands. "I want to go home, please," she whispered.

At the coat-rack he took her cloak from the attendant and placed it about her very tenderly. His hands rested for an instant caressingly on the slim shoulders and a faint odor from her hair reached him. Both left him dull and unmoved. She was his now, he told himself as she gathered the cloak together at the neck with unsteady hands, his for the taking, and yet the knowledge brought no leap of the pulse, no response from desire. For the first time since he had met her the sight and touch of her brought no thrill. He had the unpleasant feeling that they were utter

strangers to each other. Dimly he realized that the mood would pass, but now it held him utterly, and it was with a sense of relief that he excused himself with a muttered word about cigars and entered the hall.

Waiting there at the entrance, she was in sight of a dozen tables, and aware of the curious looks fixed upon her; aware too of the whispered comments, and uncomfortably conscious of her plain dark gown and unfashionable cloak. She wanted to get out of sight, yet hardly liked to pass outside alone. In her embarrassment she dropped the little silver mesh purse she was carrying. Three attendants leaped for it eagerly. She accepted it from one of them with a smile, and the incident seemed to restore her poise. She stared back at the starers with careless, well-bred indifference; she had watched them too much not to have learned their tricks.

"You are laughing at me to yourselves," she thought, "you with your jewels and laces and paradise plumes. But I could have all that you have, and more, if I but paid the price that many of you are paying."

XVI

A HALF MOON, looking pallid and decrepit like an old roué, was creeping into the sky as they started homeward. For a ways there was little said. Gordon was still fighting the strange mood that had descended upon him, and Peggy seemed tired and listless. The car ran silently through the sea-scented night, past sleeping farms and dimly lighted hamlets, flooding its way with a far-reaching path of light that paled the weak attempt of the old moon. Presently the fresh, tingling air worked its spell on them both. Peggy roused herself with a sigh.

"It's like being in a sort of half dream," she said softly. "Everything just flows past without sound or motion. We must have come a long way from home."

"About thirty-eight miles," he answered.

Presently: "Don't you want to smoke?" she

asked. "You threw away your cigar unfinished, didn't you?"

"Would you mind if I did? You're sure?"

He stopped the car in a stretch of meadow-bordered road. Afar off a dog was barking. Amongst the bushes the early crickets were shrilling. At times she thought she could hear the soft swish of the waves on some distant beach. Gordon lighted his cigar. The orange glare of the match illumining his well-featured face. He tossed the match to the road and turned toward her with a smile.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" she smiled back. Somehow the creases seemed to have been smoothed out by that swift, silent flight, all the problems left behind. She felt passively contented and restful.

"Are you very tired?" he asked, a tender droop in his voice.

"No, not now. Riding has rested me. Only—I may go to sleep any moment."

He rested a hand on hers. Almost unconsciously hers snuggled into it.

"Do," he answered. "You'll be all right. Lean against my shoulder and I'll drive slowly."

His face bent over hers and, although she knew what was coming, she made no move to evade it, uttered no protest. Their lips met in a first kiss, a kiss that held little of passion on either side. His feeling was of tenderness and protectiveness and not a little pity; hers of mild wonder and passive content.

"I love you, sweetheart," he whispered almost reverently.

She smiled faintly in the half-darkness and closed her eyes.

Miles farther on, when he thought her asleep, she broke the long silence.

"You said to-night you thought I could be very fair," she said slowly. "Whatever happens I want you to feel that I have always meant to be. Will you try?"

"Whatever happens? Yes, I shall be sure of it, dear. But what are you thinking of? What is going to happen that might tempt me to think otherwise, Peggy?"

She made no answer for a while. Finally, "So much might happen," she replied. "I wanted you to know."

"I don't like the sound of that," he responded

troubledly. "I thought—after to-night, dear, it was settled."

"Is it?" she questioned dreamily. "How can we tell? Yes, it does seem so now, doesn't it? But there's the morning—and other mornings." She shivered a little. "I hate them, don't you?"

"Some mornings," he answered with a laugh, "are extremely distasteful. But ours aren't going to be like that, Peggy, are they, dear?"

"I'd like it to be always like this," she said. "Just the darkness and the ragged old moon and the stars and the world slipping by and the wind in my face——"

"And me, dear? Haven't I a place in it?"

"Yes," she answered, "I'm afraid so. Always."

"You dear!"

"But the morning—I'm afraid of it!"

"So shall I be in a moment," he muttered. Then, whimsically, "Let's keep away from it, Peggy. Let's go west and follow the night around the world. Shall we, dear?"

"Oh, yes!" she said eagerly, adding with a sigh: "If we only could!"

Ahead of them a broad lighting of the heavens

showed the nearing city. He pointed it out. "We're getting close to home, Peggy."

"Where morning lives," she murmured.

"Shall we turn back? There's a long night ahead, dear. Will you come with me?" His voice fell pleadingly. "We'll go back, dear, with the moon and the breeze and the stars. Sweetheart, it is settled, isn't it? Then come with me, Peggy dear. Let's—face the morning together."

She shook her head. "No, not—yet," she answered. "I've got to be sure. I couldn't bear to make a mistake. When the morning comes I want to—to be able to face it with a smile and not—hide from it! You see, don't you?"

"But you do love me, sweetheart. You've shown me that. You've confessed it a dozen times, Peggy-in-the-Rain. Come to me, dear."

"I almost—could," she answered ponderingly. "And so it must be that I—love you. Only—if it should prove to be just—something else! It isn't that, is it? Oh, I couldn't stand it if it were!"

"It isn't, dear, it isn't! You do love me, just as I love you; and that's better than anything in the world, Peggy; with all my heart and soul!"

"Do I?" she sighed. "I hope so—if I must. But, don't you see, I couldn't—now—without knowing, without being sure? You won't ask me, will you? I *do* want to be fair, really!"

He was silent a moment. Then: "No, I won't ask you, dear. You shall be sure. I want you desperately, but I'll wait for you until you are ready to come to me, Peggy."

She nodded. "Yes," she whispered, "until I know."

"And—will it be very long, dear?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said slowly. After a moment: "When we get back there—" she nodded at the brightening sky—"you'll set me down where you got me——"

"At this time of night? Never!"

"Yes, please. And then you—you'll not try to see me for—for a few days."

"How many days?" he demanded resentfully.

"Three," she answered after a moment's thought. "Then I will write to you and—tell you."

"Three days? That's absurd, impossible!"

"No, it isn't. I suppose I'd better write to a club, hadn't I?"

"No, write to my home. But three days——"

"I want them," she said quietly. "Three days aren't so many, are they, out of a lifetime?"

"But you're not going to change your mind, Peggy? No, I can't do that! I can't agree to it! Let me see you for a moment every day, dear, just for a moment. I—I'm afraid of those three days."

"And yet you are sure I really do—care for you! If I do, will three days alter it?"

"Not your caring, but——" He was silent.

"You said you'd wait for me until I was ready," she said gently. "Do you want me—before I want to come?"

"I want you every minute," he muttered. "Each day is going to be a month, Peggy! If I only knew that, at the end, you'd be the same——"

"If I only knew it I'd not ask for them."

"Well, all right," he agreed finally. "You'll write to me Saturday? You won't forget? You won't think that—perhaps it doesn't matter?"

"I'll write," she promised gravely.

And afterwards, speeding downtown through the long streets, he regretted his complaisance and would have her let him speak to her by telephone each day. But she refused, and in the end he

accepted her terms with what grace he could find. But when they reached the corner he was again in revolt.

"I can't let you go this way," he said as he stood beside her on the curb. "Why, I don't even know your name, dear, nor where you live!"

"My name is Peggy," she answered with a little laugh, "Peggy-in-the-Rain; and if you don't know where I live, you know where I work. And so, if you don't hear from me Saturday, you can track me to my lair. Good night. It's been a wonderful evening, every bit of it. And you've been—very patient and—and nice with me."

"Tell me you do love me, dear," he whispered, drawing her to him in the shadow of the car.

"I do, oh, I do!" she faltered.

An instant after she tore her lips away from his with a gasp that was half a sob and fled across the street under the blue-white glare of the lights. He watched her until she was swallowed up in the darkness of the side street, his heart pounding and his head reeling. Striving to light his cigar his trembling fingers dropped it in the street.

"Peggy," he groaned, "Peggy-in-the-Rain, what have you done to me, dear?"

XVII

WEDNESDAY, Thursday and Friday were to be lived through. That was the thought that came to him first in the morning. The three days stretched before him blank and interminable. He regretted agreeing to the terms she had made. All sorts of doubts assailed him. Perhaps, after all, it had been with her merely an infatuation, a hysteria of sentiment that would wither under the first cold, gray light of morning. He had assured her that she loved him, and had believed it then, but supposing that her momentary fears had been well founded, that the love had been only a flash of passion born of the adventure, of the lights and music and the night with its wan moon and myriad stars, only a reflection of his own desire. Then to-day, or to-morrow, or the day after, would bring her counsel, and that Gordon feared. He sneered at the chivalry that had allowed her to slip away from

him, even credited her with a sophistication that would allow her to find amusement in the ease with which she had evaded his importunities and escaped from a situation which, as he told himself savagely, might easily have produced different results. By the time he descended to breakfast he had worked himself into an extremely ugly mood.

But later, after a hard gallop through the Park, the soft, warm kindliness of the spring morning worked a change. He recalled her words and the brave timidity with which she had spoken, her face across the table, above the pink and white of the flowers, her eyes with the stars reflected in them. He closed his own eyes and heard again the sudden leap of passion in her voice as she had whispered, "I do! Oh, I do!" there in the black shadows of the corner; felt the ghost of that kiss on his mouth. He threw his shoulders back and drew a long breath of the scented air. He was glad, immeasurably glad that it had all happened as it had. She loved him, she was his and in her own time she would come to him under no compulsion save that of her own heart. And then, God helping him, she should never have a moment of regret.

Theirs should be a marriage in the true sense. All the gold rings and mumbled words in the world could make it no more sacred, no more binding.

Afterwards he staved off doubt and the ceaseless longing for her by making plans for their future. There would be a house in town, and in the summer—well, perhaps only a nest of a bungalow somewhere in the mountains or by the shore; that should be of her choosing, but it must be so small that she would have no cares; two or three servants would be enough. He looked forward eagerly to the furnishing of the places. They would do that together. He saw them riding about town from store to store, side by side in a hansom. He paused and frowned. They would have to be circumspect. He was not going to have her pointed out in restaurants and leered at and whispered over. Well, then, perhaps not a hansom. She should have her own carriages and electric, of course. He would look to the ordering of those at once, and in one of those they could do their shopping. There was to be no expense spared; he only feared that she might restrain him in his joy of extravagance. The town house should be all that his own staid and old-fashioned

home was not, a place of soft colors and shaded lights, of shimmering, silken rugs underfoot. He smiled with pleasure at the idea of having her own rooms furnished and decorated in a shade of blue to match the wonderful color of her eyes.

But before that they would steal away on the *Siren*. It could be done. No one, beyond the sailing master and crew, need know. Of course, ultimately every one would know; it would become for a week or two the gossip of drawing-rooms and cafés; that could not be helped; but he would delay that time as long as possible.

And equally, of course, his mother would learn of it. He was sorry for that. He had virtually promised only a fortnight or so ago that there would be no more illicit affairs. But this was different; only he knew that his mother would fail to discern the difference. He wondered whether, after all, it might not be possible to keep the affair secret. Instead of a house in town they might have one somewhere outside; perhaps in one of the towns along the shore. But reflection showed him the futility of that plan. He was too well-known to hope to escape unrecognized; besides, it

would look—perhaps to Peggy herself—as though he were ashamed of her, ashamed of the attachment. No, the thing must be done decently, openly. After all, he was doing only what a dozen men in his set were doing, and doing with the tacit consent of society.

These plans for the future kept him occupied through the first two days. On Thursday, so impatient was he to see the fulfillment of them, that he started house-hunting. And late in the afternoon he found what he wanted, a three-story dwelling in one of the Fifties, just around the corner from the Avenue, an English basement house with a white marble front that had been rebuilt by a Western millionaire two years before and later abandoned as being two modest. The price was high, but Gordon was beyond thoughts of price. He instructed his broker to take an option on it, and went down to his club well satisfied.

Peter Waring dropped in presently from an afternoon affair of some sort, where he had somewhat disregarded his doctor's instructions and imbibed far from wisely. Gordon listened for a while to his maunderings and then took him home.

"Get into a cold tub, Pete," he admonished him, "and brace up. What are you doing this evening?"

"No' a thing," said Peter. "Got 'n' susshesh-ions?"

"Yes. Let's go to a show. I'll drop around for you at eight-fifteen, old man. Don't forget the tub."

"Nev' fear, Gordie. Always ready for lil' fun. Thash kin' hairpin I'm."

At half past eight Peter was sober but hazy. They went to a theater together and dropped into Louis Martin's for supper. Peter was all for finishing up the evening in a blaze of glory, but Gordon had no heart for it. The music affected him strangely, and he was rapidly acquiring a fine case of blues when Peter caused a diversion.

"Heard about Tommy Tupence?" he asked. "Gone home to Hingland."

"The deuce! What's wrong?"

"Chucked."

"Never!"

Peter nodded cheerfully. "A bit of a facer for Tommy, I'll bet. They say he's been pasting a few more mortgages on the old home to keep

his end up here. It's a cropper for poor old Tommy, what?"

"Rather! But—why, I thought it was as good as settled!"

"Everybody did. I fancy the old gentleman is discouraged. First you, you know, and now his Lardship—or his Grease, or whatever he calls himself."

"Seen Leona since?"

"Yes, last night. Seemed very fit. She's a wonder, that girl."

"Ye-es."

"Well, ain't she?" Peter challenged.

"Of course she is. I was only wondering—why."

"Don't. It's no use. Never waste time wondering why any woman does anything. I don't know; you don't know; the women don't know."

"Wrong, Pete. They know but they can't explain so we'd understand. Well, I'm surprised."

"Same here." Peter ate his egg Benedict in silence for a few moments. Then he buried his face behind his napkin and said: "I say, Gordon, you know—I'm thinking of—of taking a chance myself."

"Are you? What sort?"

"Matrimonial."

"Still got that obsession, Peter? Found the happy partner of your woes yet?"

"I'm telling you, ain't I?" growled Peter. "She can't any more than throw me down, eh?"

"She might jump on you afterwards," replied Gordon. "They sometimes do. May I ask who 'she' is?"

"I've told you." Peter reddened. "It—it's *her*."

"Take your time," said Gordon patiently. "No hurry. There, now, try again, old man."

"Go to the devil! It's Leona. I told you so."

Gordon stared. Then he whistled. Then he grinned.

"You're not fooling, Pete?"

"Of course I'm not," Peter growled. "Why not, eh? Tell me why not? Isn't she a fine girl?"

"Yes, she is," replied Gordon sincerely. "She hates me like poison, but——"

Peter shook his head. "No, she don't."

"Don't what?"

"Hate you. She only thinks she does."

"Well, it's a damned good imitation!"

"I know." Peter wagged his head gravely. "You don't know women for a damn, Gordon."

"And you do, you fat-head?" jeered his friend.

"Better than that, anyway. If you asked her to marry you to-morrow she'd grab you."

"If she did," replied the other grimly, "it would be so she could make my life a burden to me!"

"That's the only thing keeps me back," ruminated Peter. "If she wants you I dare say she'll turn up her nose at me, what?"

"*If* she does! Don't be a fool, Pete. I tell you she can't stand me around her."

"All right; your way. But—now, honest, would you try?"

"Why not, as you say? Only—I never knew you cared for her, Pete."

"We-ell, it's been sort of gradual. It's like drinking."

"Eh?"

"Starts in easy and you think you can quit any time you want to, and then you try and you can't let go to save your life. See what I mean? That way with me."

"Pete, you told me not over a year ago that

you thought Leona a stunning girl, but that you'd as soon think of marrying the dome of—of Saint Paul's, I think it was."

Peter had the grace to blush. "My mistake," he said. "Anyway, I'd rather marry the dome of Saint Paul's than any one else I know. Only thing is, as I say, if she's still stuck on you——"

"She isn't! That's your silly imagination. Ever mentioned the matter to her, Pete?"

"About—— "

"Yes, about wanting to marry her."

"No, not exactly; not in words, you know. I've been keeping her in flowers pretty regularly for a month or so; ever since she got back from the South, you know. I guess she has a hunch how it is with me."

"Unless she's a lot more dense than I think she is," Gordon laughed. "Well, go in and win, old man. Here's luck!"

Peter drank gloomily. "How about you?" he asked. "You still thinking of getting married?"

"Only thinking," replied Gordon gayly.

"Hm; I wish you would."

"The devil you do! A case of misery loves company, eh?"

"No, but if you got married she'd see it wasn't any use. Then maybe she—she'd consider me, what?"

"Pete, you're a silly ass," said Gordon affectionately. "Take my word for it that Leona Morrill loves me just as much as she loves a snake."

Peter shook his head, unconvinced. "Maybe. Anyhow, I guess I'll take a chance."

"Tell you what I'll do, Pete. I'll bet you a hundred she accepts you. What do you say?"

Peter cheered up. "Take you," he said promptly. "Make it five if you like."

"No, I don't want your money, old man. It's just for the sport."

Peter gravely made a memorandum in his book. "Hope I lose it," he said.

"If you do," said Gordon, "you'll be able to afford it."

"Look here," truculently, "if you think it's her money——"

"Soothe yourself, Pete. I don't. What you're after is position."

"Go to the devil!" responded Peter with a grin.

XVIII

WEDNESDAY and Thursday passed laggingly. Friday found Gordon nervous, unstrung, alternating between a calm certainty that all would come right and a despairing certainty that Peggy was lost to him. Hoping, but scarcely expecting that she might write to him to-day instead of waiting for the morrow, he stayed at home all the afternoon, breaking a business appointment to do so, and watched for the postman. As the time passed his nervousness became an irritability so unusual that Hurd became worried and dogged him solicitously until Gordon, with a flare of temper, damned him away. After the last delivery had been made he slammed out of the house and walked through a drizzle to the nearest club, where, by two in the morning he had managed by execrable playing, to lose many dollars at auction.

By Saturday morning the drizzle had become a

very healthy downpour. Meaning to arise early, he overslept and reached the dining-room at half-past nine. The mail was heaped beside his plate. His heart, none too steady at best to-day, seemed to turn completely over as he sank into his chair under the sympathetic and comprehending eyes of Hurd. He pushed the grapefruit away and took up the *Herald*.

"Coffee, Hurd," he said. "Nothing else, please."

"The kidneys are very nice, sir," ventured Hurd.

"Nothing else, Hurd," responded Gordon in a tone that was final. Hurd poured the coffee gravely. Then he cunningly moved the toast-rack nearer.

"You may go," muttered Gordon, glancing unseeingly at the first page of the paper. Hurd retired noiselessly. Gordon gulped half the coffee, seized the letters and went to the window. There, with hands that trembled, he went over them in feverish hurry. Circulars, bills, announcements, broker's communications fell unheeded to the carpet. He had never seen Peggy's handwriting, and his first draw was a blank, an invitation to dinner.

Impatiently he tossed it aside and again shuffled over the remaining letters. One, addressed in an easy flowing hand on a cheap business-shape envelope, was thrice disregarded, and only when he had been disappointed four times did he open it, already concluding that she had written, if at all, too late for the first delivery. The single sheet of cheap gray paper inside didn't fit the envelope and Gordon scarcely troubled to glance at the signature. But what he saw was sufficient to rivet his attention.

He let the note drop, fumbled for his cigarette case, and, not until he had sent a half-dozen clouds of blue smoke at the gray, rain-blurred window did he rescue the letter and, with pounding heart, read it.

I wonder [she wrote] if you have any idea how hard it is for me to write this. I have tried already four times, and this, my fifth attempt, will prove no better than the others, I fear. Give me credit for this, for it would be so very, very much easier to forget my promise and not write at all. I've been thinking it all over. I've done nothing much else for three days. Now that I have reached my decision it seems so evident that I should have reached it Tuesday night that I can only wonder. What you wanted and, for

I am going to be quite honest, dear, what I wanted, too, must not be. Don't think, please, that this decision has cost me no unhappiness, for it has. *I love you.* I want to tell you that, I want you to believe it. The only consolation I find is in the knowledge that what I feel for you *is* love and not what I feared. Perhaps if it were not love I wouldn't have the strength to say no to you. But it *is* love. I tell you so gladly, and without shame. You've made me love you so much as to make what you proposed impossible. If I cared less, I might consent. As it is, I dare not risk it. I could never share you with another. I should hate the secrecy, the continual pretense. I should want to shout it from the house tops, dear, and not hide it. Can you understand what I mean? I fear I don't make it very plain, but you must forgive me, for my mind is tired and my heart is very wretched. I don't want this to make you very unhappy, dear, and yet I am selfish enough to hope that you aren't reading it with a sense of relief. I want so much to believe that what you have offered is just as much love as mine is. I am going away. I shall be gone when you read this. Not so much because I don't trust you as because I am just learning myself and don't yet know my own strength. Don't try to find me, dear. I want this to be good-by. And don't try to learn who I am. Just let me be Peggy-in-the-Rain, the girl you cared for for a while and who cared for you. Thank you for your kindness to me, thank you for making me love you, for I think I am happier now in my unhappiness than I was before

when my heart was quite empty. I shall read of you and hear of you, and always there will be some one praying God for your happiness. Good night and good-by. Sincerely,

PEGGY.

God bless you and keep you, dear.

XIX

THE *Siren* lay in Gloucester harbor, anchored in four fathoms off the Field Rocks, with the wooded slopes of Fresh Water Cove rising green to the hot glare of an August sky. Across the blue water lay Ten Pound Island, bare and sun-baked and rock-girdled, the squat lighthouse agleam in the heat. The tide was going out over the bar, past the end of the long, gray breakwater, and as the yacht swung slowly around, the town, wandering helter-skelter over its granite hills, moved into the vision of the two men who, for an hour past, had had the after-deck to themselves.

For three weeks the *Siren* had sauntered up and down the coast from Shelter Island to Eastport. This morning she had come down from Portsmouth. To-morrow she was to make the run across the Bay to Provincetown. Four days later she was due at Newport, where Mrs. Ames was domiciled for the summer in the old-fashioned wooden

palace that Gordon's father had built almost thirty years ago. The occupants of the luxurious staterooms had changed from time to time during the cruise and now of the party of eight on board only Gordon himself remained of those who had set sail from Newport. Mortimer Poole and his bride—he had married Sallie Craig in Philadelphia in June—were ashore with Mrs. Craig's sister, Gwen, and Lieutenant Haight, on leave of absence from the Torpedo Station at Newport. Mrs. Morrill and Leona were below, doubtless evening up for sleep lost last night when an affair at the Wentworth had kept all hands on shore until three o'clock.

Stretched in deck chairs under the green and white awning lay Gordon and Peter, Gordon a little more tanned, a little thinner, a little graver than in May; Peter a little stouter and much more contented. His engagement to Leona had been announced in June and Peter declared that they were now on their trial honeymoon. They had joined the *Siren* at Bar Harbor four days ago, and Mrs. Morrill, a poor sailor, had been lamenting the fact ever since. Since the engagement Peter had formed the habit of wearing a perpetual grin,

which made his round face look more like a jovial full moon than ever. Gordon had grown used to the grin, but he still found Peter's rhapsodizing on the subject of Leona rather trying. If allowed to, Peter would talk Leona from morning till dark. He had been doing it this afternoon, and Gordon, gazing across the harbor, had good-naturedly seemed to listen. As a matter of fact, he had heard nothing that Peter had said for a half hour. Eight bells struck, and Gordon, coming out of his day-dreaming, broke into the middle of one of Peter's glowing periods without knowing it.

"She's up a half this morning," he said.

Peter stared, open-mouthed. "Who?" he asked.

"C. and W."

"Oh!" Peter took a sip of the contents of the tall glass at his side in an effort to readjust his thoughts. "That's good. I told you so, too. I suppose even Lovering's come 'round by now, eh?"

Peter smiled. "Lovering still regards me as a socialist, but I fancy he thinks me less dangerous than at first."

"You could have knocked me down with a

feather the day I took up the paper and read that you'd started in to oust those Johnnies. I thought you'd forgotten all about it."

"No, but I funked it. Then—then something happened and I had to find something to do or—or jump into the river. So I did that. It was a good fight." Gordon smiled reminiscently. Then he sighed. "But it was easier than I thought it was going to be. Old Stimson disappointed me. He threw up his hands too early. As a matter of fact I suppose the Commerce Commission inquiry had them scared anyway."

"A good joke on them," chuckled Peter. "The Commission let us down darned easy, what?"

"Too easy by half. They ought to have made us sweat blood. The joke of it is that the Street still thinks the reorganization was a sop to the Government; that it was understood we were to make changes if the Commission would be lenient."

"That so? I say, Gordon, I'm not much of a business Johnnie, you know. What about these darned meetings? I got a notice last week of one. Do I have to trot back to New York?"

"No. Send in your proxy made out to me or Sewall. That'll do just as well."

Peter sighed his relief. "Well, any time you really want me to—to do anything," he said vaguely, "you let me know, eh? Of course, it would be rather a bore to go back there in this weather, what?"

"It would, Pete. That reminds me. I'm going over the line in September. Why don't you and Leona and Mrs. Morrill come along? I'll make you comfortable."

"Rippin'! I'd like to, old man. I don't know, though, about Leona and her mother. I say, you—er—you say something about it, eh?"

"All right. Anyway, even if they don't want to come, you'll join me, won't you?"

Peter looked grave until he caught Gordon's twinkle. Then he grinned again. "Oh, I don't mind your jokes, old chap. Just you wait till you get caught!" He was silent a minute. Then, lowering his voice, he said: "By the way, remember that time I told you about her?"

"About who?"

"Leona. You know; I told you one night in some restaurant or other that I was thinking of doing the Steve Brodie; recollect?" Gordon nodded. "Well, say, old chap, I made a crack

about her caring for you. Remember that? You said I was wrong, but I didn't believe it. Well, you weren't!"

"I'm never wrong," said Gordon gravely.

"Shut up! But I—asked her; see?"

"The devil you did! Rather cheeky, wasn't it?"

"N-no, not the way I did it. I used diplomacy." Gordon smiled. "I told her I'd heard it said, you know, that she was sort of sweet on you, but that you said there was nothing to it. Of course, I put it carelessly; see?"

"Peter, without desiring to appear unduly inquisitive, may I ask you to repeat just what she said, in her own language?"

"Of course. She said you were dead right and that folks were always making cracks about things they didn't——"

"Peter."

"Eh?"

"I said, her own words."

"Oh, well, I don't remember just how she said it. But that was the idea. And she said that if you were the only man in the world——" Peter stopped, reddening.

"She wouldn't marry me?"

"Er—no, not at all, old man! Nothing as—as vulgar."

"Then what?"

Peter sought desperately for words. "Well—er—only that she—she'd die an old maid!"

"Thanks! I feel better," Gordon laughed. "Anyway, I'm glad your doubts are laid at rest, Pete. Otherwise I suppose you'd have gone through life viewing me with black suspicion, eh?"

"Rot! That's not it at all. Only what bothered me was how the deuce she could care anything for me, do you see, if—if she cared for you. I dare say I was an ass to believe what I heard."

"You were, Peter. Have a fresh drink?"

"No, thanks. You see, I'm just getting that liver of mine out of pickle, and I don't—what's that?" Peter struggled to his feet, beaming as Mrs. Morrill and Leona came out on deck. They were both dressed for shore.

"Oh, here you are, Mr. Ames," said Mrs. Morrill. "I thought perhaps you had both gone on shore and left us alone away out here on the ocean. Thanks, Peter, but I shall take this straight chair. It isn't so hard to get out of. Mr. Ames, do you

suppose somebody could put us ashore? I want to get a few things at the shops. I dare say—" her gaze wandered seaward along the horizon— "I dare say there *are* shops?"

"I think you'll be able to find anything you want if you don't want what they haven't got, Mrs. Morrill." He gave orders for the launch.

"I've had such a delightful rest," pursued Mrs. Morrill. "Do you know, I felt rather done up after last night? So I lay down and almost went to sleep!"

"I slept a whole hour," observed Leona. "I also snored. If you hadn't been asleep, mamma, you'd have heard me."

Peter looked pained. Gordon smiled. "You, too," he asked, "have shopping to do?"

Leona nodded. "I suppose so. A woman can always shop, you know."

"You'll come with us, Peter?" asked Mrs. Morrill. "I hardly know whether I ought to ask you, Mr. Ames."

"Thanks, but I think I'll stay aboard. Peter will show you where the stores are. He's never been in Gloucester, I believe, and so will be an excellent guide. Leona and I are staying here."

"Leona? Why, I thought, dear, you especially wanted——"

"I've changed my mind, mamma." Leona tossed her sunshade onto a chair. "Run along. Peter, be careful of mamma at the landing. She has a passion for falling down."

Peter looked his disappointment, but departed happily a moment later, Leona smiling down on him from the railing. Then, as the launch puffed away, she seated herself comfortably and removed her hat.

"Allow me," said Gordon.

She yielded it to him and pulled at her gloves. The steward bore away hat and parasol and an order for two rickeys. Gordon seated himself at the other side of the table with its bowl of nasturtiums and its litter of newspapers and magazines. Leona folded her gloves and then glanced across at him calmly.

"Well?" she asked.

Gordon offered his cigarette case and she shook her head. He lighted up, flicked the match over the rail and smiled.

"I wonder," he said, "why you're doing it."

"Doing——"

"Marrying Peter."

"Oh. Do you really want to know?" He nodded. "Well, then, because he is a man, in spite of his laziness, and because I hope to be able to care a great deal for him in time."

"I'm glad," he said simply. "I rather love old Peter."

"Just Peter, please."

Gordon looked his inquiry.

"Because after I marry him he will not be 'old Peter' any more to any one. Have you noticed any change in him yet, Gordon?"

"He is supremely happy, Fair Lady."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing else? I hoped you had. The fact is, Gordon, that Peter is changing and doesn't know it. A year from now you won't think of calling him 'old Peter.' Peter's dawdling days are almost over." She was silent a moment. "Poor old Peter," she murmured.

They laughed together.

"He won't like it at first," she reflected. "He's so used to being a lizard, you see."

"A lizard?"

"Yes. Haven't you ever watched them? They sit in the sunlight, with their eyes closed, all day long. That's what Peter does and always has done. I haven't told him yet."

"Don't," laughed Gordon. "He wouldn't believe it."

"I'm wondering what to make of him." Leona frowned a little. "He isn't brilliant, Peter isn't. What do you think of Wall Street?"

"For Peter?" Gordon shook his head. "I doubt it."

"So do I. Of course there will be money enough, but just to lose it doesn't signify much. Have you ever heard him express any enthusiasm for anything?"

"Nothing but you, Leona."

"Well, I shall have to think of something. I won't marry a lizard."

"He knows horses pretty well," said Gordon presently.

Leona raised her brows. "Oh, my dear Gordon, is it as bad as that? Think of all the worthless folks you and I know who 'know horses'! It's appalling!"

There was a short silence. The steward brought the rickeys. Gordon finished his cigarette and tossed it overboard. Then,

"I suppose you know he was a little bit jealous of you?" she asked.

"Yes, he intimated as much—without meaning to. He also informed me half an hour ago that it was all a mistake; that you had reassured him by saying that if I were the last man on earth you wouldn't marry me." Gordon smiled across at her. She nodded calmly.

"Yes, we have to lie sometimes. As a matter of fact, Gordon, you and I both know that I'd have jumped at you any day in the week."

"And been supremely miserable ever afterwards," he said gayly.

"Yes, I'd have had to risk that. Still—" She pondered a moment, studying him. "Why didn't you want me, Gordon?"

"Aren't you putting the screws on a bit hard, Leona?" he asked with a grimace.

"Oh, that—Don't answer if you don't care to. It's perfectly safe now, I assure you. Besides, I—recovered some time ago."

"I don't think that was difficult to see," he

said with a smile. "Just how bad do you hate me?"

"Not a bit. I never did. But you wouldn't let me—care for you, and I had to do something—or pretend to." She laughed lazily. "I fancy it helped, Gordon."

"The funny part of it is," he said, "that if it weren't for Pete I'd—try my luck."

"It wouldn't be any good, my dear. I've recovered, as I say. Besides——"

"Well?"

"You don't want me; you want—any one, Gordon. You're lonely and down in the mouth. Take my advice and be careful for a while or you'll find yourself married and done for. It's horribly easy. I almost did it myself."

Gordon smiled assent, thinking of the banished Tommy Tupence. Neither spoke for a minute. A crisp, cool breeze ruffled across the harbor, bringing grateful relief from the humid heat of the day. At last Leona, setting down her glass, said:

"You didn't keep me prisoner here to talk about Peter. What is it, Gordon?"

"You remember the little boy who broke into the family conversation with 'Now let's talk about

something interesting. Let's talk about me'?"

"Very well, let's talk about you."

Gordon, leaning forward, studied his clasped hands a moment soberly. "I guess," he said finally, "you know pretty well what the subject uppermost in my mind is, Leona. I don't ask you where she is. I only want to know that she's well and—contented."

"Gordon, I wish I could tell you, but I can't. I had only a note from her in May, wasn't it? saying that she was leaving New York, and saying that she would write to me again. She never has yet. I've wondered why she went. I've wanted to ask you, but—well, I hardly dared."

"She went—" He stopped and viewed her doubtfully. "I want to tell you, Leona; I'd like to tell you the whole thing; only—I wonder if she would wish it. God knows I've ached to tell some one for months. You were her friend; she cared a lot for you; she told me so once. What do you think, Leona?"

"I can't decide that, Gordon. If you want to tell me and it will not hurt her, why, do so. She shall never know from me."

"Well, she went because she had got to caring

too much for me, Leona. That sounds a rotten thing to say, but it's the truth. She begged me not to try to find her. Well, I didn't. That's the only decent thing I can say for myself. I drove her away from home, and for all I know she may be starving somewhere this minute."

But Leona shook her head. "She isn't, Gordon. She's too clever a girl for that. She is probably on a newspaper somewhere. I'm certain that if she were ever really in distress she'd come to me or write. I wouldn't worry about that."

"I hope you're right," he answered. "Sometimes I dream the most—the most damnable things about her. Do you believe there is anything in dreams?"

"Only indigestion," she replied lightly. "I suppose, Gordon, you didn't offer her marriage? Don't answer if you'd rather not."

"How could I?" he asked with a gesture of helplessness. "You must understand how I am placed. God knows if I had only myself to consider I'd crawl on my hands and knees to her and beg her to marry me."

She smiled faintly. "You men are strange creatures, aren't you? If the tables had been

turned, Gordon; if it had been Peggy that was rich, do you suppose she'd have considered any one else?"

"Don't make it harder," he muttered.

Leona laughed scornfully. "You're all cowards, my dear Gordon, every last one of you, in the final assay."

"Is it cowardice to consider my duty, my father's wishes, my mother's happiness?"

"Yes! It's always cowardice to break a woman's heart rather than overstep conventions!"

"I don't speak of conventions. Conventions be damned! But my mother——"

"Your mother would be disappointed, Gordon; she might even be very unhappy for, let us say, six months, although that's a liberal estimate. To save that you send poor Peggy into exile with—well, hearts don't break, Gordon, but I've a notion they fracture; and the doctors say a fracture is worse than a break. My dear, men are brave enough physically; I dare say you'd have gone through fire and water for her; but they're arrant cowards morally. Gordon, if I cared for a man who was poor or disgraced or anything else do you think I'd fold my arms like Napoleon at

Waterloo or Austerlitz, or wherever it was, and prate nobly about duty? Not much! I'm just as fond of money and what money can buy, of position and what position can give as any woman in the world, but if the right man came along and crooked his little finger I'd—"

Up went one of Leona's feet in a whisk of lace and a white pump flew across the deck.

"—Kick the conventions into a cocked hat and follow him!"

Gordon stared. "Good Lord, Leona!" he exclaimed.

She laughed grimly. "I know. You're terribly surprised. Leona Morrill is supposed to be a lump of ice and a block of marble and—and a piece of wood all rolled into one. But I'm not. I'm just the same as every other woman when it comes to—to the fundamental. And with a woman the fundamental isn't duty or decency or position or wealth; it's love! Will you please hand me my pump?"

"I beg your pardon," he murmured, as he rescued it.

"I beg yours," she laughed. "I've doubtless shocked you terribly?"

"No, but you've surprised me. After this when I think I know a little about women, Leona, I'll take myself gently but firmly by the slack of my trousers and conduct myself around behind the barn and kick myself into a suitably humble frame of mind."

"My dear Gordon, if men would only stop talking about understanding women and realize that a woman is only a supersensitized—is there such a word?—a supersensitized man they'd have no trouble understanding us. The mistake comes in starting out with the preconceived notion that we're something utterly different. We aren't. We're just like you, only—only more so!"

"I'll try to remember," he answered with a smile. Then, "So you think I acted the coward, Leona?"

She nodded vehemently. "Yes, I do, but I have no idea that I can make you see it. Still, perhaps you didn't love her enough. I'm liable to take things rather seriously, you see."

"Love her! Good heavens!" he groaned.

"But now—not quite so much?"

"More, much more, Leona. I thought I cared—a good deal—before; and I did. But after she

went away—I began to really understand how much—she meant to me. Oh, but what's the good of talking?"

"Lots. Talking always helps, a fact recognized by my sex, Gordon, and ignored by yours. Besides, we started out to talk, didn't we? So let's talk. May I have one of your cigarettes, please? Do you know, Gordon, I believe it was your taste in cigarettes that first pleased me with you?"

Presently she continued, watching a blue swirl of smoke blow to leeward. "Did you ever learn her name?" she asked.

"No, I never tried. Damn it—I beg your pardon!—but sometimes I wonder if I wasn't a fool to obey her."

"You mean not try to find her?" Leona considered, revolving her cigarette between shapely fingers. "N-no, I don't think you were. I know Peggy fairly well and I'm pretty sure she meant it, Gordon. She—she has more courage and determination than many girls." She was silent a moment. Then, with a sigh, "Why didn't you believe what I told you in Aiken, Gordon, and let her alone? I told you she was not—not the sort

of girl to take you without the formality prescribed for such cases."

"The mischief was already done," he muttered. "I—I was fond of her the first time I saw her; that day in the woods."

"Fond! Couldn't you have denied yourself that much? You'd have saved yourself a lot of trouble."

"I'm not sure I wouldn't do it again, if I knew what I know now," he replied. "I'm rotten miserable, and yet——"

"But does it occur to you to think that possibly she may be unhappy, too?"

"Yes. And yet—oh, I don't know! Perhaps she's all over it by now."

"Let us hope so," she said. He flashed a look at her. "No? You don't agree with me? You'd rather have her unhappy?"

"No—oh, I hardly know, Leona. Only, if she really cared for me, why couldn't she have——" He paused. "God knows I'd have been good to her. There'd never have been another woman, Leona."

"Um; perhaps. The trouble would have been that if there had been another woman she'd have

had no chance. After all, marriage has that advantage; it gives her the right to fight. I don't think I'd blame Peggy for not falling into your arms on your terms, Gordon. Perhaps you would have been always kind and always cared, but she may have doubted it. I should myself. She'd have been giving a good deal for just the honor of being pointed out as 'Gordon Ames's girl,' wouldn't she?"

"I've never blamed her. If I'd felt that way I'd have followed her. She was right. Circumstances were against us, that's all."

"Circumstances," she mused. "Well, perhaps you're right. Perhaps I've been too hard on you. We are tied, we folks with money. Only——"

"Only?" he prompted.

She smiled whimsically. "Only I wish I had your chance, Gordon!"

"You could do no more than I've done," he said tiredly.

"Possibly not. I don't know. It's easy to lay out a course for somebody else, isn't it? Is that the *Siren's* launch coming down the harbor?"

Gordon looked. "Yes. I hope I haven't bored you too much?"

"Not a bit. I'm glad we've had this talk. It's cleared things up a bit for me, Gordon. I've been thinking rather hard things of you. I'm glad to know that—you really cared for her. If I ever learn anything about her—and I shall sooner or later, I'm sure—I'll tell you what I can—if you still want to know."

"Thanks. I shall—always."

"Well—" She watched the approaching launch, its smokestack aglitter in the lengthening rays of the sun. "Try to forget some of the things I've said, Gordon," she went on. "I'm afraid they have been things an unmarried woman is supposed not to even think of. And—and don't think because I spouted of the ideal lover that Peter deserves your pity. He doesn't. Peter will get more than many men get when they take unto themselves a wife."

"I'm not pitying him, Leona," Gordon replied. They both had arisen and walked to the rail. "I think I'm envying him." He took her hand. "And I think I was a fool, Leona, once."

"Only once?" she asked with her slow smile.

"If it were anybody but old Peter, I'd try again," he said warmly.

She shook her head. "Look at my eyes, Gordon."

"I'm looking," he replied a little unsteadily.

"They're not blue."

He flinched. "But if blue eyes are not for me?" he whispered.

"It would never do, Gordon dear. And yet," she added a trifle wistfully, "had you talked so a year ago—. Heigho, I suppose everything's for the best in this funny, puzzling old world."

He frowned. "Then—it's true, what you said, Leona? You really have—recovered?"

She looked at him straightly. "Quite, Gordon," she answered.

He dropped her hand. She laid it detainingly on his arm as he stepped back.

"Be honest, Gordon. Isn't it better that way?"

"I suppose so," he replied ruefully.

Leona smiled. "That's your silly old masculine vanity talking. But I don't want to hurt your vanity, Gordon, for they say that's a man's tenderest spot. I'll give you a salve for it. I said I had quite recovered. So I have to all practical purposes, but, Gordon dear, a woman never *quite*

gets over caring for an old sweetheart. Even now, if you tried you could make me—well, make me unhappy, I think. But it wouldn't be really you—not the you of to-day—I'd be troubling for; it would be the old you and all the old illusions of the time when I really—did care. Do you see what I mean? There's a sop for your vanity. I wouldn't have told you, though, if I weren't quite sure that you wouldn't try, Gordon." She put out her hand to him and he took it. "We've got to start fresh from now, Gordon, and be just the very best of friends. I'm going to marry Peter in October."

"In October! I didn't know you'd decided."

"I hadn't—until a moment ago."

She turned and waved at the launch.

XX

THE *Siren* reached Newport in due time and the party scattered, Mrs. Morrill and Leona going to the Berkshires for a visit and Peter, intensely miserable, remaining for a while with Gordon. There was a good deal of gayety that summer and the two men took their parts, neither, however, having much heart for them. Gordon played polo twice, but being by no means in top form, gave it up, much to Mrs. Ames's relief. Since the reorganization of the Central and Western directorate the affairs of the road had been making steady demands on his time and he had plunged into them very gladly, gaining as time went by both executive ability and enthusiasm. There was much to learn and he was doing his best to learn it. The Central and Western was his business, his life's interest, he decided, and he meant to learn his business thoroughly. And he meant to run it honestly. Lovering still shook

his head over the, in his judgment, impractical theories advanced by Gordon, but, shorn of his former despotic power, he could do no more. The new directors were more or less heartily in accord with Gordon's views, and he was able to go about the rehabilitation of the road unrestricted. The last of August he went to Chicago and met the division heads in conference. They had never seen the president and were not predisposed in his favor, but, although, he was still ignorant of the practical details of traffic and transportation, a fact which he cheerfully acknowledged, his enthusiasm, frank desire to learn and a certain personal magnetism won them. On that trip Gordon settled a long-standing dispute with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, and, as a result, a slight increase in wages was announced effective all over the system on September first. The general manager of a little jerk-water road in the Southwest who, in five years, had changed a line of rusty rails into a dividend-payer, was bought over to the Central and Western and given the office of Assistant to the President. The general manager, proving himself out of sympathy with the road's new policy, was superseded and minor

changes in the traffic department followed. A publicity bureau was placed in charge of a practical advertising man with headquarters in Chicago, and the road's new slogan, evolved by Gordon, "The One Best Road—C. and W.," began to placard the country.

Peter went on to the Berkshires the last of August and a week later Gordon followed him for a few days' stay. It was then that Gordon and Leona, in secret council, decided on a career for the unsuspecting Peter. Peter was to be elected a vice-president of the C. and W. Once in office, Leona declared calmly, she would see that he earned his salary. When they told Peter he grinned amiably.

"Don't know a thing about it, Gordon," he said, "but I'm willing to learn. I suppose a vice-president has his own private car; what?"

Peter and Leona were married at St. Thomas's early in October. Gordon, as best man, sustained Peter through the trying ordeal and saw them off on the steamer afterwards. Peter's grin was broader than ever. Gordon declared later that it was visible long after the *Kaiser Wilhelm* was hull-down on the horizon. On the steamer Leona

kissed Gordon good-by, with Peter's entire approbation. "Dear Gordon," she murmured with a rather tearful smile. Halfway down the gangway he turned to wave them a final adieu Peter shouted an absurd message of some sort Leona only waved to him, but the look in her eyes stayed with him all the rest of the day.

"I wonder if she lied," he said to himself once.

The leave-taking left him depressed for several days, and he hailed his Western trip with genuine relief. He went alone, save for the presence of his secretary and a valet, and was gone just over a fortnight. In that time he covered every mile of C. and W. track and talked with hundreds of subordinates from division superintendents to track walkers. He ended his trip at Chicago, reaching there at dusk of a warm Indian summer day. Tired out but thoroughly satisfied with the results of his fortnight's labors, he left his car with a sense of relief and was driven to a hotel on the lake front. His rooms were already reserved, and, leaving the task of registering to his secretary, Gordon turned at once to the elevator, hoping that, by avoiding the desk, he might escape running into acquaintances. That was not to be,

however, for while he was still waiting an elevator door rolled open and out stepped the Golden Widow, a dazzling apparition of black net and white shoulders and bediamonded hair.

"My dear Mr. Ames! Who'd ever thought of finding you here?"

Gordon bowed over a plump gloved hand.

"I've been wondering why, myself, until this moment. One needn't ask after your health, Fair Lady."

The Widow gave a soft shriek of comic alarm. "Don't tell me I'm stouter than when you saw me last," she begged.

"Your charms have visibly increased, but not in that way, I'm sure," he answered gravely. "Are you staying in Chicago?"

"Oh, dear, no! One never stays in Chicago; one merely passes through. I am a bird of passage, Mr. Ames."

"I should have said a bird of paradise," with a glance at the aigrette in her hair.

"You say such nice things," she sighed. Then, with a frown: "But I ought to be cross with you. You didn't treat me very nicely at Aiken, Mr. Ames."

"Really?" he asked concernedly. "In what way did I err?"

"Oh, your sins were of omission, sir. You never once made love to me."

"I never dared, Fair Lady. I adored you in hopeless silence. You were always surrounded by Peter Waring."

She made a face. "Peter! A nice admirer he proved! As soon as my back was turned he scuttled off and got himself married! I suppose you were at the wedding? But, of course, you were! I remember now; you were his best man, weren't you? Was it a pretty wedding? I sent a present, but I couldn't be there. I forget what I sent, but I remember it was something very much nicer than he deserved. I was in Switzerland at the time. Or was it Trouville? Really, I ran around so this summer I've quite forgotten. It was a long way from St. Thomas's, though. Wasn't it a surprise to you, his marrying Leona Morrill?"

"A most agreeable one. I've always been very fond of Miss Morrill."

The widow's artistically penciled brows went up in polite disbelief. "Well, now that she's married

your best friend, I think you're wise in forgetting and forgiving. Personally, I never could see Leona. Considering what very new people they are I think her airs are insufferable. But I must go. Have you seen a very large, fat man with a lovely bald head roaming around anywhere?"

"Having been in Chicago quite half an hour," he replied seriously, "I've seen some three or four thousand large, fat men. Large, fat men seem to be the principal industry in Chicago."

She rapped him playfully with her fan. "How we New Yorkers do love to 'knock' poor Chicago, don't we?"

"It's the breath of life to us," he replied. "May I ask whether the gentleman you describe so—so seductively is a new conquest, Fair Lady?"

"Conquest indeed! Nobody ever looks at me any more!"

"From discretion, not choice."

The widow bridled and again brought her fan into use coquettishly. "The gentleman is Mr. Audel. Do you know him? He's quite charming, really. I ran across him at Berne, I think it was, and quite by accident we came back together on the *Lusitania*."

"The scheming rascal!"

"But tell me what you're doing here, Mr. Ames. Are you here for long?"

"Only passing through," he replied with a smile. "I leave for New York to-morrow."

"Oh, so soon?" she said disappointedly. "I hoped you'd have time to be a little bit nice to me. What about this evening? Couldn't you dine with us? Mr. Audel would be so pleased."

"Not this evening, thank you. I'm dead tired. Just got in from a two weeks' swing over the road. May I look you up to-morrow forenoon?"

"Do! My suite is 203. Don't forget!"

"I live for to-morrow!"

"You're a good-for-nothing blarnier," she laughed as she swept away.

Gordon dined in his room alone. His secretary, having friends in town, had hurried into dinner togs and taxied off northward. A bath had rested Gordon considerably, and, as he loitered over his coffee in a dressing-robe, he meditated spunking up and going to a theater. There were plenty of people he might have called on, but he didn't feel in the mood for them. Turning to the theatrical advertisements in an evening paper, he

weighed the merits of the offered attractions. But before he had arrived at a decision the telephone bell tinkled and he crossed the room and answered it. There were four newspaper reporters downstairs who would like to see him, he was told. He instructed the desk to send them up. He was quite ready for them, having spent a part of the morning preparing, with his secretary's aid, a typewritten interview in which the incomparable merits of the Central and Western were fully set forth. When the four young men were seated about the room, each with one of Gordon's best cigars in his mouth and a whisky-and-water at his elbow, the *Tribune* representative acted as spokesman and for twenty minutes Gordon, responding to skillful questions, held forth on the crop condition, the rumored shortage of cars, the probability of a dawn of new prosperity, immigration, the reorganization of the C. and W. and Chicago as a metropolis. They scorned his prepared interview politely, but bore copies of it away with them, promising to use as much of it as possible. By the time they had filed out it was too late for the theater, and Gordon, now mentally alert, viewed the thought of slumber distastefully. From the windows the

lights of the boulevard stretched enticingly away into the southern darkness. He decided that he would put on some clothes and go for a walk. But when he was almost ready the telephone again rang and he was told that the *Star-Courier* reporter begged a few minutes' conversation. Gordon was for refusing at first, but the opportunity to remind the public of the many excellencies of the C. and W. counseled consent.

The *Star-Courier* reporter proved to be a youth of nineteen or twenty with an alert self-possession and a compelling smile. Gordon, intending to present him with a copy of the typewritten tract and hurry him out, found himself again submitting to an interview. The *Star-Courier* was apparently less interested in the C. and W. than in Gordon Ames. The reporter glanced at the typewritten sheet and stuffed it into his pocket.

"I'll give that to our railroad editor; he might use some of it," he announced. "What we want is something about yourself, Mr. Ames. You see, the average reader doesn't give a cuss whether the Central and Western is paying dividends or going into the hands of receivers. What he—or she—especially she—wants to know is how Mr. Gordon

Ames was dressed, what he looked like, whether he smoked a cigar or a cigarette—cigarettes always make a hit with the women readers—and what color pajamas he wears. It's the personal note I'm after."

"Evidently," replied Gordon dryly.

"Yes; and if you can tell me whether you're engaged or going to be soon, it'll make a real hit."

"I am not and don't expect to be at present."

"What's the reason?" The reporter pulled a wad of soiled paper from his pocket and fumbled for a pencil. "Don't you believe in marriage?"

Gordon, undecided whether to be amused or annoyed, laughed. "No, you don't!" he said. "I refuse to have my views on matrimony set forth in your paper. I was on the point of going out when you were announced, so I'll have to ask you to put your questions quickly."

"All right. Sorry to keep you, Mr. Ames. I'd have been around before only I got the assignment by phone only ten minutes ago. Our woman reporter had the job, but she funked it."

Gordon's heart jumped. "Woman reporter? Really? I fancy I've had a narrow escape."

The other grinned. "Believe me, you have, Mr.

Ames! She's a smart girl and she'd have turned you inside out if she'd wanted to. Why she backed down I don't savvy, because you ought to be good for a full column to her. How do you like Chicago?"

"Perhaps you'd better tell me the young lady's name so I can be on my guard if I ever run across her," said Gordon carelessly.

"That wouldn't do; it would be queering her game; see? What do you think of our new hotel?"

"I used to know—or, rather, I once met a young lady in New York who was on one of the papers. I wonder if it can be the same one? Youngish, is she?"

"About twenty-four or five, maybe. I don't know much about her. She's been with the *S.-C.* only a month or so. She's smart, though. I suppose you have a good many friends in Chicago?"

"That sounds like the lady I had in mind," pursued Gordon. "Rather dark blue eyes?"

The reporter looked at him quizzically. "We're never going to get anywhere at this rate," he said. "You'd better stop interviewing me, Mr. Ames, and let me fire the questions."

Gordon smiled. "You answer my questions and maybe I'll answer yours. At least, I will if I can."

"That's fair. The girl's name is Mills or Mill."

"Hm; first name?"

The other frowned, trying to remember. At last, "Margaret, I think." He grinned. "She never told me, but I have a strong notion that it's Margaret."

Gordon tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice as he asked, "Do they ever call her Peggy?"

"Who? You can bet I don't! She'd jump me, I guess."

"I see; it's probably not the same lady. Now, then, what do you want?"

"Well, suppose you give me a good hot roast on Chicago society; usual New York style, you know; mention of pork packers and newly rich—I never could say it in French—and a passing jab at our fair city's efforts to become a center of art and literature. That always gets their goat."

"I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you." Gordon laughed. "I don't know much about Chicago

society or its artistic and literary ambition. I have many delightful friends and acquaintances in and about Chicago, and I usually enjoy my visits here. This time I am here only overnight; it's a business trip, you see. I've just completed an inspection of the Central and Western——"

"Then you like Chicago?" interrupted the other in disappointed tones. "That's bad. I thought," he added reproachfully, "you were a New Yorker."

"I am. Mustn't I like Chicago?"

"Shouldn't be done." The reporter shook his head, scribbling on the pad. "Still, I don't know. It hits a rather original note, doesn't it? 'New York Millionaire Likes Chicago.' That's fairly startling. How does it feel to come into a hundred millions at twenty-one, Mr. Ames?"

"I never experienced it."

"Oh, well, I don't pretend to have the exact figures," replied the other carelessly. "A round hundred sounds well, though. By the way, did you reorganize your road yourself? The papers said so, but——"

"The road was reorganized by the stockholders," said Gordon. "Now, I'll really have to ask

you to excuse me. I'm sorry I haven't supplied you with more—material, but——"

"Oh, that's all right." He dropped paper and pencil into his pockets and arose. "I've got enough for a half-column or so, and I guess that's about all the space they'll give me. If you'd got around earlier in the day you could have had all you wanted."

Gordon stared. "You mean to tell me that you're going to write a half-column about what I've said to-night?"

"Oh, well, principally. Of course, I'll have to put in a good deal about how you looked and acted. Anybody ever speak of your resemblance to Henry Miller?"

"Henry Miller?"

"Yes, the actor."

"Not that I'm aware of," replied Gordon, amused.

"Good! It's new, then. Of course, you're younger, and I don't say that the resemblance is striking, but it makes a good line. 'One immediately notes the strong resemblance to Henry Miller.' Most everybody knows how Henry Miller looks, you see. It beats trying to describe each

feature. It's an idea of my own. I always decide who a person looks like and it saves trouble. Most women, by the way, look like Maxine Elliott or Maude Adams," he added with a grin.

"And most men like Henry Miller?"

"Well, sometimes it's John Drew. But that's mostly the way they dress. Drew's losing vogue a little now. About time, too. As for Maude Adams, why, I don't think a whole lot of her beauty, but the women are always tickled to death if you say they resemble her. If I want to lay it on a bit artistically I say they have Maxine Elliott's beauty and Maude Adams's charm. That rings the bell every time. Well, I'm much obliged. Hope you'll like the story in the morning."

"I shall love it," responded Gordon gravely. "Good night. By the way, let me offer you a cigar."

"Thanks; I don't mind."

"Take two or three, won't you?"

"Sure. I'll make a hit at the office. 'Have one of Gordon Ames's two dollar cigars?' I'll say. The city editor's been throwing the harpoon into me lately and maybe this'll square me for a while. Much obliged. Good night."

"Good night. Those cigars, by the way, cost only thirty-seven and a half cents apiece by the box."

"That's all right. The city editor won't know it!"

When Gordon emerged from the elevator five minutes later the reporter was leaning over the desk in conversation with the head clerk. He seemed to be exhibiting something and it looked like a cigar. Gordon went into the library and opened the big dictionary on the end of the table. When he finally stopped turning the leaves this is what he read: "Margaret. (Gr.) A pearl.—Dim. Gritty, Meg, Madge, Maggy, Margie, Margery, Meg, Meggy, Meta, Peg, Peggy (m and p being cognate letters)."

XXI

'M AND p being cognate letters'! 'M and p being cognate letters'!"

The phrase clung, and Gordon found himself saying it over and over in a sort of singsong as he left the hotel and turned southward along the boulevard. The night had grown dark. Over the lake, away from the effulgence of the city lights, the sky was like black velvet. There was a feeling of rain in the still, mild air.

"'M and p being cognate letters'!"

Back of its absurd babbling his mind was striving to work calmly. "'M and p—'" Could it be Peggy, the girl the reporter had spoken of? Margaret Mills! She had never told him her name, but "Margaret Mills" seemed to touch a chord of memory. Surely he had heard the name before somewhere! Margaret might well be her real name, Peggy only a diminutive—"m and p be-

ing cognate letters!" And what little the reporter had said of her tallied so well with what Gordon knew! "She'd have turned you inside out if she had wanted to!" Gordon groaned. She had already done that!

He had all along imagined, for no special reason apparently, that Peggy was in Philadelphia. Now he became certain that she was right here in Chicago. There was breathless excitement in the thought. He was in the same town with her, perhaps only a block away for all he knew! Tomorrow he might meet her face to face on the street! He had agreed not to search for her, but should they meet by accident she could lay no blame on him. And if they did meet— All the old longing surged up in him imperiously, chokingly, leaving him dizzy for a moment.

A corner light proclaimed Fifteenth Street, but he kept on with no thought of distance nor direction. The boulevard was fairly empty. Now and then a carriage pattered by or an automobile swept past in a glare of light, but there were few pedestrians. The silence grew with the blocks traversed and the city seemed hushed in expectancy. The air had grown lifeless. Far off

to the westward a flash of lightning ripped the darkness.

If they did meet—what? What was to be said that had not already been said? It was not likely that five months had shaken her determination. He had allowed her to choose and she had chosen; and he had accepted the verdict with what he prided himself was good grace; would it be fair to try to alter it all now?

The sound of running steps half a block ahead broke into his thoughts. A dark figure crossed the boulevard from one of the streets leading toward the lake and paused under a lamp-post. In the stillness Gordon heard, or thought he heard, the buzz of the alarm as the man released the hook. Gordon hurried his pace, but before he reached the corner the figure had disappeared again, running, into the darkness of the side street. It was a narrow cul-de-sac, poorly lighted, lined with shabby-genteel brick houses with high stoops. Lights shone here and there from transoms and windows, and three-quarters of the way toward the blind end of the street a yellow glare streamed across the pavement from an opened door. Figures moved there and voices came

toward him down the shallow canyon. He broke into a run.

When he reached the house a small throng had already gathered about the door and on the sidewalk. Footsteps rang on the uneven flags as the neighboring houses caught the alarm. Smoke curled through the doorway, and the gas-light at the foot of the narrow stairs burned dimly.

"The kitchen's all on fire," said a shrill, excited voice. "We tried to put it out, but we couldn't." Gordon turned to find a white-faced, untidy maid beside him.

"Are they all out?" he asked.

"Cook ain't come yet. She went up for her box. She'd better hurry, hadn't she? Do you think it'll burn all down?"

"Anybody ring the alarm?" asked a pompous elderly man in a flowered dressing-gown. He pushed past Gordon and addressed a stout woman who stood nearby with a bird cage in her hand. Within the cage a canary kept up an agitated chirping. "Too bad, Mrs. Judson, too bad, on my word!" exclaimed the elderly man. His tones quite plainly proclaimed his delight in the excitement. "Where did it start, ma'am?"

"In the kitchen. Cook had some fat on the stove and the fire was too hot, I guess, and it boiled over and the first thing I knew the house was full of smoke. Seems like them engines might get here some time, don't it?"

As though in reply there came the distant clanging of a bell and the shriek of a whistle. Gordon glanced up at the front of the house. On the third floor a window showed a square of light. He walked to the farther side of the street and peered upward again. As he looked an arm reached up and drew down the shade.

"Somebody's up there yet, ain't they?" asked a voice beside him. It belonged to a tall youth with a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth.

"Did you see somebody pull the curtain down?" demanded Gordon doubtfully.

"Sure I did! He'll be comin' down on a ladder if he don't get a move on."

Gordon pushed his way through the growing throng and sprang up the steps. Warnings followed him as he met the first choking gust of smoke at the door. Halfway up the first flight of stairs he heard from behind him the clanging

of the engine gongs and the trampling of the horses. From above him came a thumping sound, and as he reached the hall above he saw a shawled and bonneted woman descending the next flight dragging a small trunk behind her.

"Hurry up!" he called to her. "Is there anyone else up there?"

She paid no heed to him, seeming in a trance of terror, as, still tugging the trunk behind her, she went along the narrow passage to the lower flight, muttering to herself. Gordon's first impulse was to take the trunk from her, the next to let her manage it herself and make certain that the upper floor was empty. The smoke was pouring up the staircase well and his eyes were smarting and running. He took the next flight in bounds. The smoke was thicker here than below. Over his head a dirty skylight caught the reflection of the dim flame of the bracket gas light. Five doors opened from the hallway. He took them in succession. The room on the back of the house showed signs of hurried flight. Gordon lighted matches as he flung open closed doors. An untenanted room, a closet filled with brooms and brushes and soiled linen, another unused room,

and, finally, a door at the end of the hallway, locked. He beat on the panel and shouted.

"Is there any one in there? The house is afire!"

There was no response. Gordon held his handkerchief to his face and again tried the door. It resisted firmly and he turned away. But halfway to the stairs he stopped. Surely it had been in that room that the hand had pulled down the shade! The cook? She would never have stayed to lock the door and remove the key! And no one else had descended the stairs! Unless both he and the youth with the cigarette had been victims of optical illusion, that room was still occupied! From below came the sound of breaking glass, the tramp of feet and hoarse commands. From without came the steady throb of the engines. The light in the bracket burned red through the murk. Gordon ran back to the door, raised a foot and sent it crashing against the lock. The door gave and he stumbled into the room. A small table went over as he tried to save himself by it and an ink bottle hurtled across the floor, leaving a trail of black on the shabby carpet. He closed the door behind him and leaned

against it for an instant, fighting for breath. The air was purer here. Across the room the gas was turned low, but there was light enough to see the bureau by the window, the tall ungainly wardrobe, the overturned table, a chair or two and a small bed upon which lay stretched a woman's form, black gowned, flattened against the rumpled coverlid. Gordon's streaming eyes closed in agony, and when, groping blindly toward the bed, he opened them again a white face, filled with terror and a great wonder, was looking up into his. With a cry he sank at the side of the bed and gathered her into his arms.

XXII

PEGGY! Peggy, is it you, dear?" He covered her face with kisses and she clung to him silently, tremblingly. For a long moment he held her, everything forgotten in the transport of wondering joy. Then, tearing himself from her arms, he rushed to the window, sent the shade hurtling up, opened the window with a crash and turned on the light.

"Quick," he said, "we must get out of here before it's too late. It's all on fire below. Stop for nothing!" Then, as she raised herself, dazed and bewildered, he threw open the doors of the wardrobe and seized a cloak from a hook. He threw it around her and lifted her to her feet. She swayed and clung to him desperately.

"Come," he said, "and cover your face with your cloak." Half leading and half carrying her he reached the door and pulled it open. A cloud of smoke rolled in upon them. He paused an

instant, choking in the acrid fumes, and in that instant she pulled back toward the room.

"Wait," she whispered.

He let her go, groping for the door and closing it again. On the floor lay a sheet of paper. She picked it up and thrust it toward him.

"Take it," she said.

He crumpled it into a pocket and, throwing his arm about her again faced the door.

"Can we get out?" she whispered almost calmly.

"We must!" he answered. "Don't think I've found you again only to lose you, Peggy."

"Well——" She raised her face, a little smile trembling about her mouth. He bent and kissed her.

"Peggy!" he murmured with a sob. Then, "God, we *must* get out of here!" he cried, and pulled the door open. Again the smoke leaped upon them as, closing his eyes, he groped his way along the hall. He searched for his handkerchief, but only a sheet of crumpled paper came from his pocket, and he held that against his nose as they came to the top of the stairs. Down they went. Once she fell, but his arm saved her, and

then they were on the second floor and the smoke seemed lighter. Water hissed below them and a red glow beat on his closed lids as they reached the last flight. At the top he paused and looked with streaming eyes. Like a great snake a fire hose was pulsing along the hall below, spouting water from a leaky coupling, but the way was clear. Rubber-clad forms passed in and out, and the placid face of a policeman, on guard, peered around the corner of the doorway. He saw them when they were halfway down the stairs and hurried up, exclaiming. He would have taken Peggy in his arms and carried her down, but Gordon held her tightly to him. "I'll look after her," he muttered. The spray from the hose drenched them as they passed, and then they were outside and an excited murmur that was almost a cheer arose from the throng that, held back by the police, watched from a little distance. Gordon opened eyes and lungs to the fresh air and led Peggy down the steps. A youth with a fire badge on his coat and pencil and paper in hand got in the way, volleying questions. Gordon swore at him and pushed him aside. The crowd, sympathetic and admiring, opened and let them through.

Somewhere in the confusion the reporter lost them. At the end of the block a cabman, pausing for a minute to watch the scene, found himself suddenly supplied with a fare.

"Drive downtown; anywhere for now; I'll tell you later," said Gordon as he helped Peggy into the little musty coupé and followed her.

The cabby snapped his whip and the roar of the engines lessened as the tired horse drew them northward. For a block or two no words were uttered in the cab. Peggy lay in his arms, silent. Now and then a little tremor passed through her. Gordon, his mind still in a state of chaos and his head and lungs aching from the smoke, pressed his face to the brown hair and watched the lights file slowly past the window. The incidents of the last quarter of an hour had taken on the quality of a dream. Presently he muttered wonderingly:

"Peggy, Peggy-in-the-Rain, is it really you?"

She answered with a sigh and a pressure of the hand in his.

"I don't understand it yet," he went on after a moment. "What were you doing in that house?"

"I lived there—ever since I came here."

"Good Lord! What a place!"

"It was the best I could afford. I haven't—done very well lately."

"But didn't you hear the engines, Peggy? Didn't any one warn you?"

There was no answer; only a shiver as she clung closer to him.

"And I came near going back without finding you!" he exclaimed in sudden horror. "My God, dear, if I had!"

"You wouldn't have," she answered with certainty.

"No, you're right, I believe. God knows how I happened to be there at all, Peggy."

"I expect God does know," she whispered.

"You mean— I wonder!" There was awe in his tone. "If he did, Peggy, I thank Him. When I beat on the door— Didn't you hear me, dear?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you answer? Were you too frightened?"

She suddenly began to sob softly against his coat.

"Peggy—sweetheart—don't cry, dear!" He lavished caresses and tender words, and presently

the sobs ceased. "It's all right now, dearest, isn't it? We've found each other again and nothing is going to part us, Peggy-in-the-Rain. Forget about to-night, dear. You're tired and frightened——"

"Not now." She sighed and pressed closer into his arms. "But I was—horribly. I guess I—couldn't have done it, after all."

"Done it? What, dear?"

After a moment she answered in whispers. "I meant to stay there," she said. "I thought perhaps it would—be over soon that way. That's why I didn't answer when you knocked——"

"Peggy!"

"Yes." She shuddered and his arms crushed her against him. "I didn't recognize your voice, though. Isn't that strange? Sometimes I've thought I could hear it if you even whispered my name a thousand miles away!"

"Oh, my girl, I've whispered it a thousand times a day! But why did you want to do such an awful thing, dear?"

"I was—tired; and discouraged. It was your fault." She laughed a little ghost of a laugh. "The city editor said I was to go to the hotel

and interview you, and I refused. He—he said I must either go or leave——"

"The damned brute! Who is he?"

"Never mind him, Gordon. He was right; I ought to have gone. But—I couldn't! My week was up to-morrow night and I didn't know where to go next. I was here nearly a month before I got work on the *Bulletin*. And then I was ill for three days and they let me go. After that I got a place on the *Star-Courier*. And I made good, only when he gave me that assignment to-night I couldn't take it. And after I got home things looked so sort of—of hopeless that I—I wrote to you." Her voice died away so that he barely caught her words at the last.

"You wrote to me, Peggy?" he exclaimed. "Where is the letter, dear?"

"I gave it to you before we left. Don't you remember?"

He searched his pocket and found it, a crumpled, smoke-saturated ball.

"I have it," he said. "May I read it?"

"Yes, after you leave me."

"I'm not going to leave you," he asserted firmly.

She was silent for a moment. They were oppo-

site the park now, the old horse still ambling along and every hinge and spring in the cab squeaking in protest. At last:

"Please, to-night," she begged, gently. "I want you to read that first. I—I won't run away from you. I—I've had my lesson."

"I didn't mean to bother you, dear; only I can't let you get very far away. But I won't trouble you. I've learned my lesson, too, dearest; that I can't do without you."

He lifted her wet face and kissed her on the mouth. Her lips trembled under his.

"I don't want to die now," she whispered.

"No, no, no! You're going to live, Peggy, and be happy!"

"Happy!" she murmured dreamily. Then, suddenly tightening herself in his arms, "Oh, yes," she cried, "I want to be happy! And I shall be, shan't I?"

"Always, sweetheart! Happy together, you and I! For oh, Peggy, Peggy-in-the-Rain, I love you so!"

After a moment he asked: "If you wrote that letter to me, dear, you didn't mean to—to leave me?"

"No. That was after. I had finished the let-

ter and was lying on the bed. Then I smelled the smoke and heard Mrs. Judson crying fire, and something whispered to me to stay there and be rid of all the loneliness and weariness and—and aches. And so when they beat on my door I answered and said I'd come right down. Then I pulled the pillow over my head and—and prayed. And I cried a little because I was lonelier than ever. I wanted so much to see you—first, you see. Then you called to me and I thought perhaps you were a fireman and that if I didn't answer you'd go away again. And—and when you did I was terribly frightened. I think then I'd have tried to escape, only I couldn't seem to move. And then—you came back!"

"Thank God I did!" he cried. "Oh, Peggy, why did you try such a thing? What would I have done without you, girl?"

"I thought—you'd forgotten me," she whispered. "The papers said you were sailing around on your yacht and that you were going to marry some one, they didn't say whom. And I didn't quite like you to do that—so soon!"

"I've never forgotten you for an instant, Peggy. Every hour has been full of you. I've

seen your face in the clouds and the water, and in my dreams I've held you as I'm holding you now. You wrote that I was not to try and find you, Peggy, and I didn't; but, oh, girl dear, it was the hardest task any man was ever set! I hoped you were well and—prospering, dear; if I had known how it was with you I'd have searched and found you. Leona said you would surely write to her or go to her if you were in trouble."

"I couldn't. I was ashamed. She knew—about us, Gordon. I had to tell her. I was so unhappy. Do you care—very much?"

"No. But I never guessed she knew!"

"She's married."

"Yes, and I hope she'll be happy, Peggy."

"I hope so, too. Perhaps she will be. She's very—wise."

The cab came to a stop and the driver asked directions.

"Where shall I take you, dear?" Gordon asked.

"I don't know," she answered untroubledly. "Anywhere. I think I'm too tired and happy to sleep, but I want to lie somewhere in the dark and—think it all over."

Gordon remembered the name of a small and unpretentious hotel and directed the cabby to drive there. The weary old horse turned slowly about and they creaked off again.

"In the morning I will come for you, dear. You'll want to sleep late, though, won't you?"

She heard the wistfulness in his voice and pressed his hand. "I'll be ready when you come, Gordon, whatever time you say."

"Then—but I won't be unreasonable. Shall we say nine—or ten, Peggy dear?"

"At nine." Then she laughed amusedly. "Do you realize that I haven't a thing with me? Not even a hair-pin?"

"By Jove, what a thoughtless brute I am! We can buy some things, can't we? What time is it?" He looked at his watch. "It's only about ten o'clock!"

"It doesn't matter. I shall get on. I only want to lie down somewhere, Gordon, and think—and think—and think." She nestled her head closer to him. "Just think and be happy, dear," she added in a whisper.

But he wouldn't be satisfied with that, and so the cabman was ordered to find a place where the

lady could buy things to wear, and presently Peggy took the bill that Gordon gave her and shopped in a little cheap store with a sizzling purple arc light over the entrance, and presently returned with a brown paper package. He took her in his arms again and they went on to the hotel. They reached it very soon.

"I'll go in with you, dear," he said, "and explain about the fire. And in the morning I'll come for you and we'll go back to the house for your things, for I don't think the fire has done much damage."

"There aren't many things I want," she murmured.

"Good-night, dearest. Do you know that you haven't told me yet that you love me, Peggy?"

"I think—I've been telling you all the time," she whispered.

"I know, but I want to hear you say it, sweetheart. You do?"

"I do," she answered solemnly.

The clerk was sympathetic as he turned the register around with one hand and thumped the office bell with the other.

"We'll look after the lady, sir," he said. "Don't worry."

With pen in hand Gordon found himself in a quandary. But one name was as good as another, and it wouldn't do to let the clerk see his hesitation. So he signed "Miss Mills, City," smiling at the thought that he was still uncertain of her name. They said good-night at the elevator door, shaking hands under the pessimistic regard of the page who waited with the paper parcel.

"At nine," said Gordon.

"I'll be ready," she answered.

Then the elevator shot upward and a moment later Gordon was out on the sidewalk, lighting a cigar, and wondering if it were not all just a dream.

XXIII

BACK in his room Gordon dropped into a chair under the light and pulled the crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket. Tenderly he smoothed it out, and then, tossing away his cigar and pressing his lips to the letter, he read what she had written.

I wonder if you will be glad to get this. I hope so. If I was sure you wouldn't be I would never send it. Perhaps I shan't after all. Things one writes at night look so different in the morning. But now it seems easy to tell you what I want to, easy to acknowledge defeat. For I am defeated, utterly, dear. If I only knew whether you still care it would be so much easier to write this. Sometimes I think you do, *know* that you do. And then the doubts come and I'm too tired and sick at heart to repel them. If you don't care any more please, *please* read no further than this. Tear it up and forget what you've read. Won't you promise this now, before you go on?

It seemed so easy—if what is easy can be the hardest thing in life!—such a fine, courageous thing to say no before and go away from you. I meant it all then, or part of me did; my heart

never did. But now all the courage has left me and I'm just tired and lonely. I thought then that I was denying you because it was right that I should, morally right, I mean. Now I think it was more my pride than anything else that prompted me to it. I wasn't willing to be pointed at, dear. I don't think I'm bad; I don't want to be. But I'm a woman and I want happiness. There is so very little else that a woman gets. If she misses that she has nothing. Perhaps I'm a coward, but I can't help it, and I *did* try, didn't I?

Now how shall I say what I want to? But you've already seen what is in my mind, dear, haven't you? That is, if you've read this far, and, oh, I hope you have! I've tried to be happy without you, and I've failed. I've tried to do without happiness, and I've failed. I think I have a right to happiness if I am willing to pay its price. I am willing. Is it too late? Dear, if you still care—not just a little, but as much as you did—come for me or let me come to you. I make no conditions. Just love me as long as you can, dear. And please, *please* don't think that I am offering to sell myself. I am giving myself—if you want the gift.

MARGARET MILBURN.

She was Peggy-in-the-Rain. Do you still remember, dear?

Afterward he read the letter again. And a long time afterward he undressed and went to bed. But sleep stayed far away from him. Some

time in the early morning he arose, switched on the lights and, seating himself at the desk, wrote a letter to his mother. He spent the better part of a half-hour at it, and when it was finished he addressed it very deliberately and stamped it and laid it on the table by the door. Then he went to the open window and leaned out. In the east there was a dim radiance that foretold the dawn. The lights along the boulevard shone blurred through a gentle rain. He held his hands out, and when they were wet laved his forehead with the moisture.

He stood there many minutes with his thoughts. At last he raised his face toward the dark sky and smiled.

"I guess you'll understand, Dad," he murmured.

A drop of rain fell on his lips, and he laughed softly.

"Was that a kiss from you, dear?" he whispered. "Was it, Peggy, my Peggy-in-the-Rain?"

THE END

NOVELS OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

THE GHOST GIRL. By Henry Kitchell Webster

Author of "The Whispering Man," etc.

A bewildering story of a beautiful girl, supposed to have died in Paris, who haunts an American artist, commissioned to paint her portrait from a photograph.

Frontispiece, $1.25 Net. Postpaid $1.37

THE LOST DESPATCH. By Natalie S. Lincoln

Author of "The Trevor Case," etc.

Nancy Newton, pledged to aid the Confederacy in every way in her power, is involved in a baffling mystery, connected with the murder of Captain Lloyd, U. S. Secret Service.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE BISHOP'S PURSE.

By Oliver Herford and Cleveland Moffett

The adventures of a clever woman thief, who steals a purse containing $25,000, and to avoid detection, secrets it in the golf bag of a traveling companion.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE AMIABLE CRIMES OF DIRK MEMLING.

By Rupert Hughes. Author of "Excuse Me," etc.

Dirk Memling, a thief with an artistic temperament, has a fancy for stealing unusual things. Assisted by his confederate, a beautiful girl, he devises the most curious and daring thefts.

Illustrated, $1.25 Net. Postpaid $1.37

THE TREVOR CASE. By Natalie S. Lincoln

The social set of Washington is deeply stirred over the murder of a beautiful society woman. The denouement is entirely unexpected and unusual.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE NAMELESS THING. By Melville Davisson Post

Something exceptional in the way of detective stories. The exciting and thrilling adventures incident to the detection of a murderer who left no clues.

Illustrated, $1.25 Net. Postpaid $1.37

THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND SHOT

By Rufus Gillmore

Several peculiar circumstances connected with an apparent case of suicide lead a reporter to the solution of a mystery quite new in the annals of crime.

Illustrated, $1.25 Net. Postpaid $1.37

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON

NEW NOVELS OF IMPORTANCE

ADNAM'S ORCHARD. By Sarah Grand

Author of "The Heavenly Twins," etc.

A startling exposè of social conditions is Mme. Grand's romance of English rural life. Love, jealousy, and intrigue involve a whole community, following Adnam Pratt's astonishing success with modern methods of agriculture.

$1.40 Net. Postpaid $1.52

GENERAL MALLOCK'S SHADOW

By W. B. Maxwell

Author of "In Cotton Wool," "Vivien," etc.

The brightest and happiest of the author's novels. A stirring romance of fascinating love interest. The story is of General Mallock's brilliant exoneration after 15 years of official disgrace, which has cast its shadow upon the lives of his son and two charming daughters.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

WINDYRIDGE. By W. Riley

"Here is a book about which one prophecy may be made with safety: it will be read, quoted and enthusiastically admired by a multitude of people."—*London Standard.*

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE LAND OF CONTENT. By Edith Barnard Delano

A romance of the Virginia mountains. A girl, wealthy and socially prominent, goes to live in a little mountain town. The story deals with her efforts to make a place for herself in the community and the growth of her affection for a young doctor.

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

EVERBREEZE. By Mrs. S. P. McL. Greene

Author of "Cape Cod Folks," etc.

Just as Geraldine Keevey forgot her imaginary ills and found health and happiness, so will the reader find unmitigated pleasure in this clean, humorous, love story of life "down east."

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON

THE SEASON'S FICTION SUCCESSES

THE REEF. By Edith Wharton

Author of "The House of Mirth," etc.

"Every page, while you are reading it, vibrates with that indescribable thrill of interest which only great writers are able to impart."—*N. Y. Globe.*

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE RISE OF ROSCOE PAINE. By Joseph C. Lincoln

Author of "Cap'n Warren's Wards," etc.

A romance of Cape Cod, witty and humorous, with a pretty love story between a wealthy girl and a poor man.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE ANTAGONISTS. By E. Temple Thurston

Author of "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" etc.

The conflict between a temperamental boy and his harsh, uncomprehending father.

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE INHERITANCE. By Josephine Daskam Bacon

Author of "The Madness of Phillip," etc.

A romance of New England, of forty years ago, told by an adopted English boy. *Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42*

CARNIVAL. By Compton Mackenzie

The life story of a ballet girl, remarkable in its portrayal of the soul of a girl.

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

IN COTTON WOOL. By W. B. Maxwell

An exceptional novel showing how love of self crushed out of a virile young man everything that was true and unselfish.

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

BELLA. By Edward C. Booth

An alluring widow, her beautiful girlish daughter and an impressionable young poet are the chief characters in a strong study in temptation.

Illustrated, $1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

THE OUTPOST OF ETERNITY. By Cosmo Hamilton

A powerful novel, picturing the degenerate tendencies of two beautiful girls, offspring of an ill-assorted marriage.

Illustrated, $1.25 Net. Postpaid $1.37

THE CHARIOTEERS. By Mary Tappan Wright

A woman's attempt to attain the best that is in her, regardless of convention.

$1.30 Net. Postpaid $1.42

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK LONDON